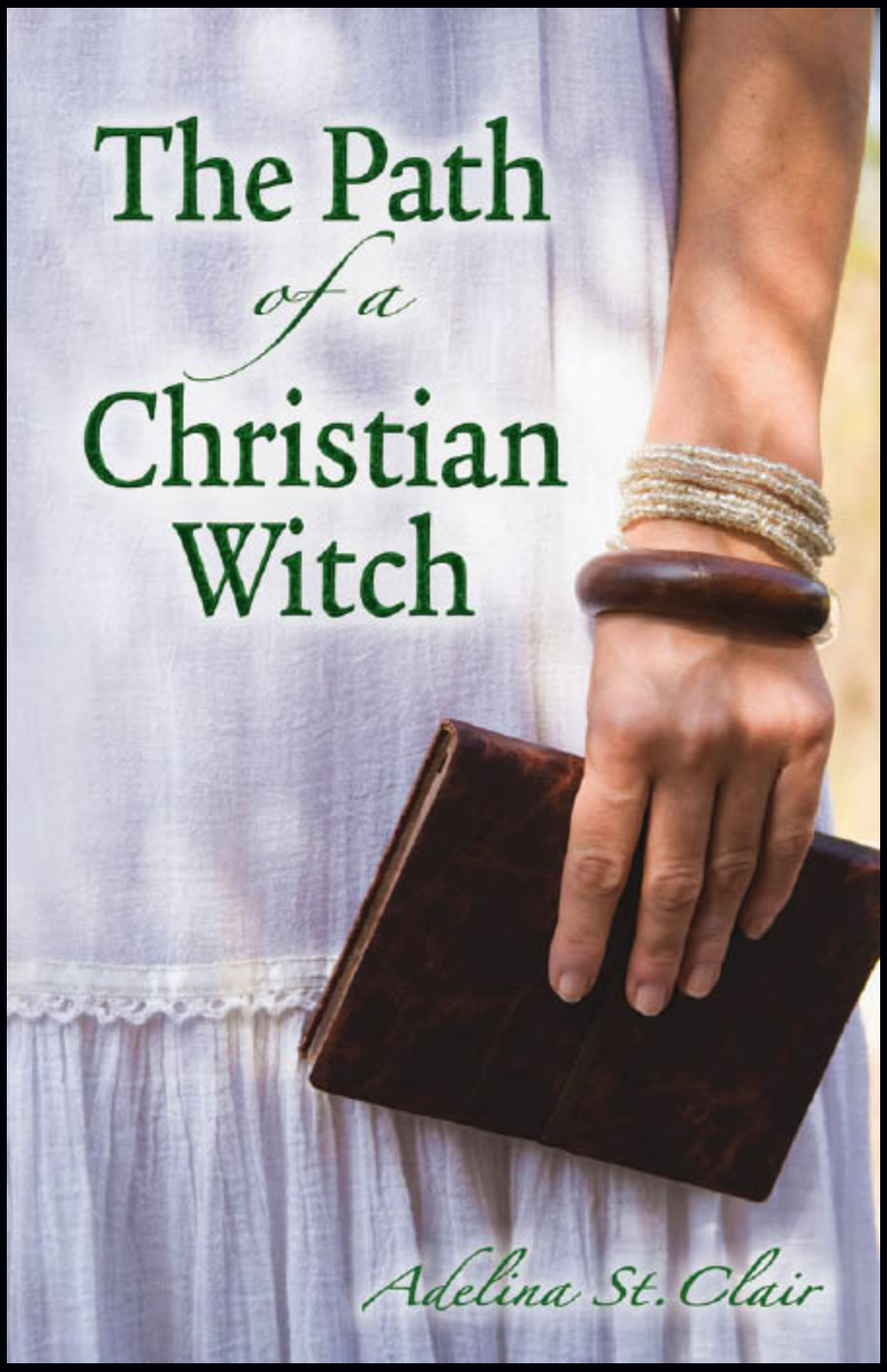
The Path
of a
Christian
Witch
Adelina St. Clair

About the Author

Adelina St. Clair has been a student of Wicca and Paganism for over ten years—a passion she combines with an ever-growing interest in Christian studies. She has also studied fields as varied as microbiology, bioethics, Reiki, shamanism, theology, and herbalism.

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The Path *of a* Christian Witch

Adelina St. Clair

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To my family,
for giving me a place to lay my roots

To Marek, my everything,
for being husband, soul mate, teacher, and friend

And to Jakub and Chiara,
for allowing me to witness love grow
right before my eyes

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Foreword

I am a Christian Witch. It has taken me many years to be able to say these words with the reverence that they deserve. It took years of searching, reading, questioning, and heading sometimes into the darkest of places and sometimes into the brightest. Many years it took me to make this statement without fear or guilt or apology. After countless attempts at explaining my path, I have found that there is no short explanation of what it is. And mere explaining, I have realized, does no justice to the profound journey of self-discovery and liberation Christian Witchcraft has led me on. It is a journey of experience, of coincidences and of pure magic, of random roads taken and of special encounters. Above all, it is a purely personal process.

This is my diary, my testimony. All names have been changed to preserve anonymity. I only hope that my stories inspire you to open your eyes to your own magic and to follow your own journey of discovery.

As is often the case with spiritual journeys, my road was not a straight one. It turned and twisted in the most unexpected of ways. It was in the widest turns, however, that I learned the most about myself and about my place in the world. I was interested in paranormal phenomena from a very young age. I was always looking for uncanny occurrences that confirmed that there was more to the world than what was visible. I started reading about astral travel and the auric field and got interested in all matters

relating to metaphysics. Concurrently, religion was also an all-powerful part of my life. I would spend hours talking to Jesus and Mary before going to sleep. They were my solace and counsel.

As I grew up, I became increasingly aware of the incongruities between my beliefs and the actions of my church. My faith was that of the innocent child, relying on the simplicity of Jesus' teachings and on the beauty of love. I could not comprehend the teachings of the men who claimed to represent him. Politics and worldly greed had entered my sanctuary, my sacred space. Like an adult who looks at her parents through mature eyes, I could not understand what my church had become. I gasped at the polemics of the church on homosexuality and women's rights. It was around this time that I discovered Witchcraft. I started reading about it and signed up for classes. I discovered magic in myself and in the whole world, and I felt reborn. The gifts I had developed as a child rushed back at me in a great wave. And yet, despite all these discoveries and the reconnection to a deep part of myself, I lived in anxiety and misery. My most intimate friends, my Lord and Lady, could not be part of this. I had lost my tradition, the rock on which my faith was built. I was lost.

Here is the new chapter in my life, and it is a beautiful one. I have chosen to bring together all the beauty in my life into one vibrant and loving spirituality. I have given up nothing. I embrace it all.

Initially, I set about the task of writing these lines with the mindset of the scholar, making a case for the possibility of the coexistence of two beautiful philosophies, Paganism and Christianity, into one coherent spiritual practice. I wanted to dig up the roots of history and find the initial meaning of Christianity, its core teachings. I wanted to tear down the politics and the perversions that had infiltrated the church. I wanted the truth to come out so that we could rebuild a faith the way Christ would have wanted. I was the new Inquisition, tearing away the hypocrisy and the injustice that had

marked the reign of the church for centuries. It was time for the Holy Institution to stand trial and to answer for its atrocities.

That version was never written. I've abandoned the role of the persecutor. He who uses the sword dies by the sword, someone once said. There has been enough bloodshed and anger in the name of the church that I decided I would add neither fire nor fuel to an already burning situation. I have no right to attack and destroy an institution that supports the faith and devotion of millions. There are good people in the church, people who believe and follow Christ's teaching and way of life. We are all brothers and sisters in this. Division and resentment is the last thing Jesus would want of us.

So I start anew in joy and celebration for the beauty I have found within myself, the vital core of godliness we all share though we call it by different names. This is the story of my experience and my vision for a new-old spirituality. Throughout, I have included my experiences as a means to transmit the lessons that life has bestowed on me in a manner that no formal text or teaching could ever have. Life is the greatest teacher of all, and each of these experiences was a lesson through which I grew. These are not guidelines for a practice. This book is meant to inspire, not restrain. Take what fills you with divine light and discard the rest. But dare to dream that your path will lead you where you have always longed to be.

I am a Christian Witch, a walking contradiction.
I cast circles and design spells of burning incense and gemstones bright.
I follow the teachings of Jesus, his message of love and compassion.
My guides are the angels, the saints, the warrior women of the Torah, the myrrh-bearers, and the Holy Trinity.
My cup and cauldron are the Holy Grail.
My herbs of worship are frankincense and myrrh.

The four archangels guard my elemental gates.
My scriptures are the Bible and the Gnostic Gospels.
My mythology is Genesis and the parables.
My guardian angel is my spirit guide.
My God is the breath of life from which all things in the Tree of Life flow.
I celebrate the Christian aspects of the Sabbats.
I celebrate the Pagan aspects of the Christian Holy Days.
I practice what is forbidden by the officials of my church.
I attend Mass.
I am priestess of my rituals.
I believe in the blessed sanctity of the earth and the heavens.
I believe in the beauty of women's spirituality.
I am not a Bible-waving, proselytizing fanatic.
"An ye harm none, do what you will."
"Love your neighbor as yourself."
"All acts of pleasure are my rituals."
"It is time to rejoice, for that which was lost is found."

Chapter 1

Foundations

The first time I walked into a Pagan class, someone asked me what had brought me there. I answered the only thing I knew to be true: it was a series of random steps. I never started out my journey being anything but myself. I just looked around me at each moment and walked toward whatever was calling me. Some doors opened up for me as others closed. I don't know if that is what we call fate or if we choose and create our lives at any given moment.

What is certain is that these random steps never intended me to reach any particular destination. If I close my eyes, however, I can tease out of my memory key moments in my life when such doors were open. These doors, once crossed, took me on the sinuous journey that is now my life. I am struck, in retrospect, with the mundane nature of these moments. I could have easily passed them over as insignificant. And yet they have built up, ever so gently, the foundation of what I would become.

A Bowl of Water

I remember a bowl of water. I remember the water swirling in the light, its pristine clarity reflecting the light of day. I remember the smell of freshness as it was being poured and the rush of sound and color as it fell below. I even

remember the metallic taste on my tongue and the cool feeling on my skin as I carried this bowl to the middle of the room. I don't remember much else of that day. I don't remember why I followed my father to church or why I followed the youth group to the church basement. I don't remember how old I was. Maybe six or seven? I don't even remember what the purpose of that bowl of water was. I think we were told the story of the Samaritan woman. Or was it Jesus' baptism?

But what I do remember with absolute clarity is the feeling of being part of something. As I carried the bowl of water, I felt as though I was part of a story that had been unfolding for thousands of years. As I sat with the other children around that small makeshift altar, I lived an experience that had up until then been denied to me. I participated in something sacred. I was no longer a mere observer. I lived and felt the mystery and the teaching with my whole being.

During my earliest years, religion was not really a daily part of my life. I was raised Catholic, but the scope of our religious practice in those years was going to church for Christmas and Easter. We celebrated baptisms, first communions, and weddings. I received formal Catholic education in school. That was it. Like many others, my parents had put churchgoing on hold when small children made it difficult to sit through services. But then my father sustained a serious work injury and decided to start going to church once more. It was at that point that I started going as well. I think it was mostly a way to spend time with him rather than due to true devotion.

Every Sunday we would walk to St-George's Church in the suburbs of Montreal, where we lived. That is where I was invited one morning to follow the other children to the basement to partake in something that changed my life. Until then, church was an absolute bore. You sit, stand, sit, stand, listening to the interminable drone of a man who looks bored to tears, too. You just sit and wait for it to be over. However, down in the basement, our

catacomb, I became involved. Through action, I began to understand the meaning of what was told to me. I began to understand the meaning of ritual. That bowl of water conveyed more meaning than could have been contained in an hour-long homily. It meant purity, cleanliness, service to others. It sang, it danced. And we gathered around it and shared this experience. Something inside me rang with the truth of that experience, and I could never be content with being a mere observer anymore. I returned every week to be a part of the mystery.

Assembly

Still, the extent of my religious life was limited to Sunday mornings. I thought little of it outside that reserved time. I spent most of the rest of my time reading and playing outside, like most children my age. I just loved to read. I'd taught myself to read by age five, and books were treasures to me. I read *The Wizard of Oz* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* so many times that the books literally fell apart in my hands. I would stay up late at night, unable to put the adventures on pause. I also loved to go to school. To study and learn: there was nothing greater.

In third grade, I took up the challenge of going to English school. Living in Quebec, I already spoke French. I also spoke Italian, which I had received from my parents. But my parents also recognized the importance of speaking English in today's world and had taken steps to find a school where I could learn the language. Under the eyes of my nervous parents, I put on my green tunic and set off to The Abbey, a private, Catholic, and English-language school at the other end of town. I did not speak a word of English at the time, but I was strangely undisturbed by that fact. This lack of concern was justified: by Christmas, I was conversing and reading like a pro.

My years at The Abbey were the best of my childhood. It was a small school of about one hundred children. The children I started school with in

the third grade were the ones I graduated with three years later. We were a family. We formed such bonds that I know that if we met on the street today, we would run into each other's arms as if we had just seen each other yesterday.

We started each day with Assembly. Each class came in to the gym row by row. The school principal stood in the front and led the prayers. We said the Our Father and the prayer to our guardian angel. Then we sang one song in English and one in French. We were then all ready to start our day. I would look around at the faces at Assembly, and I could feel a serenity and a deep joy at being together and celebrating something greater than ourselves. We sang and prayed. Nobody rolled their eyes or caused a commotion. We enjoyed this time as much as any other part of our day. My experience of religious affairs had always been tainted with the feeling that it was something you put up with. But there, in Assembly, we were singing and having a good time. It was a solemn occasion without being stern. It was joyous without being frivolous. It felt good to be there. And it became a daily part of my life.

Religion became my favorite subject. In third grade we sat in a circle, and the teacher read the stories of Abraham, Noah and his ark, and the Israelites' flight through the desert. In fourth grade we reviewed the Commandments and learned how to live together and what Jesus had taught us.

And that is when the dreams started.

As much as Jesus was becoming a part of my days, suddenly he was also a part of my nights. One night I dreamt that I was in the schoolyard with three of my friends. Jesus passed by, bearing his cross. An angry mob followed him as he made his way to the top of the mountain and out of sight. We were saddened to our core. The very foundation of our world was being destroyed, the love of our lives. We knelt down by a cross and prayed. We needed to make this moment last. We could not accept that he was gone

forever. Roman guards passed by and laughed at us and threatened us with a similar fate. We just bowed our heads and prayed more fervently, shaking with fear and yet not wanting to let go.

Words could not express the feeling that inhabited me. The love I had for the man with the cross was my treasure. I would not give it up. My soul needed it. It was a part of me. A centurion passed by and witnessed the scene. He was moved by this picture of our innocence and fervor, and he ordered the others away. He told us to go play and we did. We felt safe again to be ourselves in spite of the hostility of the world.

Dreams came every night, and I spent a lot of time talking to Jesus and God and Mary before going to sleep. I read the stories of the saints from A to Z. They were my friends, my confidants. They were a true part of my life and I wanted to live a life that honored what I learned from them. In my dreams they would talk to me and tell me great things. Yet I did not talk about them excessively, and my outer life was still largely secular. They belonged in my private sanctuary, my sacred space.

Falling from Grace

When I left The Abbey, it was as if something was ripped away from me. My friends, those I loved like family, were gone. I ended up in a school with people I just did not understand. They put attention on their hair and clothes, on boy bands and makeup. It was all foreign to me. I found comfort in sports and music and, as always, in my books. By the end of seventh grade it was clear that this was not the place for me, and I started eighth grade at a Catholic school for girls. Adolescence is a confusing time for a teenage girl. It would be no different for me.

"Forgive me, father, for I have sinned. It has been many months since my last confession."

My hands were clammy and the walls around me seemed to swallow me. I could see the faint outline of a face as the priest urged me to proceed.

"Well, father . . . " I stammered. "There was this guy . . . "

My heart was pounding and sweat was trickling down my back. The air was hot and dry, and I had a difficult time breathing. I felt my knees digging in to the prayer kneeler. I thought I was about to pass out.

The booming voice on the other side of the confessional replied: "Did you touch?"

The shame, the guilt, and the utter embarrassment came crashing down on me. The innocence of my fourteen years was not prepared for such a question. Asked so plainly, it looked ugly and depraved. We had kissed. Did that count? I assumed it did, but in this tight place, talking to this elderly priest, I was sure of nothing anymore. So, I answered, "Yes."

"Well, you know that is bad. Imagine how your poor mother feels, knowing her daughter did such things."

I was devastated. This boy had meant nothing to me. Was I no better than those other girls who were rolling up their skirts and flirting shamelessly?

All my life I had lived according to the highest ideals possible. I tried to live with compassion—listening to others, helping others. One little mistake, and all the good I had done seemed erased in one bold stroke. I believed what the priests were saying. I lived every moment trying to follow what we were supposed to do. That is what being Catholic meant, right?

I stumbled out of the confessional and into the school chapel. I dropped onto my knees and begged for forgiveness. Adolescence blows everything out of proportion, and you try desperately to hold on to something solid through the storm. The church had been my structure, my lighthouse. I had lost sight for a moment and I felt lost. I vowed not to fail again and to live by

the rules. I promised to do everything in my power to be perfect from then on.

I became superwoman at age fifteen. I trained in karate six hours a week, working out my anger and resentment toward myself. I was fearless and I showed no mercy. I joined every club and activity I could, partly to develop myself to the best of my ability and partly to keep me from thinking about this rotten feeling I felt inside. I slept little, praying to be better.

As always, the only time I took a reprieve from this self-persecution was in the presence of God. I took refuge in the school chapel every Wednesday for Mass. Very few of us bothered to show up. But there was something soothing about the velvety silence, the smell of the wood polish, and the familiar words we would all say together. It was a humble setting and I could just relax there. There were no judges inside my head. I felt at peace.

A Calling

Sister Joan had noticed my attendance, and one day she signaled to me.

"I was wondering if you would be interested in helping us with the Easter Vigil celebration?"

My high school was attached to a convent where elderly nuns came to retire. Most of the teachers were secular, and the interaction between the convent side and the school side seldom occurred anymore. This was a rare occasion to go to the convent side of the chapel, which was much bigger than our school chapel. Sister Joan gathered a few girls, and we rehearsed the choreography for the readings and for several songs and psalms. We raised our hands in unison and walked reverently in our slippered feet, moving to the words of the psalms, hymns, and prayers.

We came together on Holy Saturday for the Easter Vigil and prepared in a side room. I felt like one of the vestal virgins preparing to serve at Vesta's temple. We were excited, but we were also filled with the solemnity of the

occasion. We wore robes of white and gold, and prepared the altar for the ceremony. I felt the exhilaration of the assembly fill the chapel up to its vaulted ceiling. This was the greatest night of the year, the most holy night of all.

The organ struck a chord and we walked in, holding smoking plates of frankincense and myrrh. The smoke rose to the heavens and filled the air with our praise. We laid down our gift of incense at the foot of the altar and bowed deeply. The priest blessed the fire and soon the whole chapel was illuminated, as hundreds of little candles were ignited. In the light of the candles, everyone looked at peace. Our voices rose to glorify God in the person of his son Jesus. We recited the litany to the saints, each name like a mantra that took us body and soul.

As I moved my hands, I realized my whole being was absorbed with what I was doing. My breathing was even, my body free of tension. This energy flowed through me like the waves of an ocean. We felt the whole congregation breathe to the movements of our bodies. We felt their sighs and their uplifted spirits. I was lifting up their prayer with each step and each movement of my hands. I was bringing their whispered prayers right into the ears of God.

I could feel what it might have been like to stand in Athena's temple or in a sacred grove. I bridged the worlds, keeping one foot on Earth and one hand in heaven. I looked out at the congregation, and I knew that my presence was leading them in prayer. I wanted to walk the hallways in silent prayer, every action an act of devotion. I wanted to be a part of liturgy, a song of praise, an instrument of God's presence. I was fulfilling what I was born to be. I was clergy. A priestess for my people.

Finding Love

With time I came to realize that I still wanted to live in the world. I did not want to take my devotion and hide it within the walls of a convent. I was a bright student, and I didn't want to sacrifice the gifts that God had given me. I wanted to spread them to the world by dedicating my life to making the world a better place. I went on to college to study microbiology and immunology, in hopes of dedicating my life to medical research.

Going to college was exciting. Although I stayed in Montreal and continued to live with my family, I suddenly felt like I was part of the world. I traveled downtown every day and walked in the midst of the bustle of the workforce. I went shopping and had coffee with the girls. I discovered the city: museums, movies, clubs, and restaurants. I met new friends, and we enjoyed everything that downtown Montreal had to offer. It was just plain fun.

I walked into the school cafeteria one day, expecting nothing more than a casual meeting with friends. But when I saw him, the world collapsed around me. The noise of the crowd vanished and I was transfixed by his eyes. It took me a moment to realize that my friend was taking me right to his table. He was in her class, and she wanted to introduce me to some of the friends she was going to school with. I said hi to everybody, but my eyes stayed on him. We exchanged some banalities about our weekends or something of the sort. In my head, one thought: this is the man that I need. My whole being rang with that conviction. There was something about the sound of his voice, his bearing, and his eyes that was comforting, like a soft place to fall when the world becomes too hectic. And the most magical, miraculous thing is that he felt it, too.

He asked for my phone number, and we started calling each other. I can still see him waiting behind a column near the subway entrance, waiting to take me on our first date. We walked all night in the old city, talking about everything: our families, our love of music, our aspirations, our interests . . .

We didn't ask if we should be together or not. It was never a question. We simply were. This was love, pure and intense. The kind that takes you by surprise and amazes you. The kind that makes you believe in fairy tales and in angels, and that obliterates the ghosts of the past. There was nothing wrong here. Nothing to be ashamed of. With each kiss and each embrace, I felt stronger and more beautiful and more of a woman. I grew and bloomed and felt happiness in the core of my being. I looked back at all the time spent in misery and hurt, and I mourned all that time wasted. For now I knew with every fiber of my being that love and intimacy were the most beautiful things in the world.

My father did not share my excitement for my new sense of actualization. He could not shake the idea that his nineteen-year-old daughter, his first born, was being cheapened by some man. As I listened to his lecture, something inside me clicked. For the first time in my whole existence, I knew what it was to feel complete conviction for something. I stood up calmly from the argument and said, "No. *I* know."

I remember the look on my father's face. There was frustration, but I know I detected a hint of pride. I was not to be devastated this time, nor was my love going to be trampled through the mud. Love was my treasure. My whole being resonated with this truth. And I could see this resonance in my love's eyes as well. Only a perverted mind could see evil in the bond we shared. Those who have been profiting from caging women in shame for centuries were still hard at work. This time *they* were wrong. I was no longer bound to this perversion. I was bound only to my honor and to my love.

I started looking at my parents through adult eyes. They were wonderful, generous, loving people. But they were human. They were the sum total of their own life experiences—experiences that differed largely from my own. I realized that many of the things I had classified under the heading of "That's just the way it is" were not marked in stone. All around me, I could see the

golden cage of patriarchy, the legacy of thousands of years of Judeo-Christian rule. I saw the subtle way in which this ideology infiltrated every aspect of our lives, like a cancer poisoning us slowly. More than ever, I noticed its consequences on my life as a woman. And the church was largely to blame for this. It had soiled my sexuality, put sin into my childbearing. It had denied me my right to clergyhood. The world had followed this blindly, marking us all as cheap labor, second-rate citizens, a simple commodity to be traded and bargained for. Not only did this destroy the souls of women but of men as well, for whoever did not acquiesce to the image of the alpha male was no better than a woman.

But, there were also good aspects of religion, weren't there? Like love and spirit and a sense of community, of belonging somewhere. Of feeling safe. The ugliness was merely politics, the inner workings of the world. That was not all religion was about. Something became clear to me at this point: church and faith were two different things.

Now, *I* knew.

The rules I used to follow blindly simply crumbled to the ground. I wouldn't listen to my family, nor my country, nor my church. I now knew what it felt like to resonate with something true and pure. From now on, I would follow only my heart, and let the magic of the world surround me.

And There Was Magic in the World

My first year of microbiology had just ended. It had been difficult, grueling work, and I was happy to finally get a moment to relax. I lay on my stomach in an old, rundown apartment that my boyfriend was repainting. I liked this building, despite its rundown looks and its busy location in the midst of the student ghetto. My boyfriend was working here as a local "superman," taking care of poor students, their blocked plumbing and their failing heaters. Summer brought new waves of eager beavers looking for a dream in higher

education. That meant hot days of painting and renovating for the caretakers of the building.

I was here for a couple of hours, to relax while I waited for him to finish another apartment one floor up. I was reading *Sacred Journey of the Peaceful Warrior* by Dan Millman while lazily enjoying the summer afternoon. I had followed the author to the exotic land of Hawaii and had witnessed his many encounters. I felt great. I put the book down, turned on my back, and stretched.

It was all around me.

The Green Light.

Aqua swirls filled the room, pulsating around me like a warm blanket. The Green Light . . . How long had it been? Five years? Ten? I was just a child then . . .

I loved to read then, too, anything I could get my hands on. My father had an inclination for the paranormal and had a complete library of esoteric teachings. I remember hearing him talk about astral travel and the aura, how he had been fascinated by these phenomena. I must have been about twelve when I picked up one of his books: *The Secrets of the Aura.*[1] I would practice at night under my covers, marveling at the silver lining around my fingers like thick smoke. And the Green Light, always around me, shining with a radiance that was out of this world—a color that might be somewhere between a blue and a green, always moving in swirls in the darkness. On that, I would fall asleep.

That is how I came to understand this phenomenon we call energy. Until you feel it and experience it, it remains an abstract concept that is as flat as the words on a page. And here I was in the most unexpected of places, being reconnected with an old, old part of myself. I remembered the exercises I used to do as a child to see my aura and to leave my body. I remembered moments when I could anticipate what people would say. I remembered

vague impressions that I would get, like daydreams, only to find out that the things I had seen had actually happened to people I knew at precisely that time. And there were dreams of battles with the devil and of strange entities whispering my name. I had walked that world and I had felt its power. I had felt at home in that strangeness. So many years later, I realized that the world of men had gotten in the way. I had completely forgotten about that part of myself.

The Green Light opened a gateway through which I could peek every so often. My senses started to open up a tiny bit. Unexpected feelings often came out of this gate to nudge me out of my perception of the world—through an unexpected letter or the mysterious words of a stranger I'd met on the bus, or from a premonition of things to come, a sudden blinding flash of color, an uncanny dream . . . This repeated rush of excitement filled my days and my nights and made me look for more beauty and adventure. It became an essential, magical part of my life. The more I looked for this magical feeling, the more I found it in everything I touched. It was there in the rustling of the leaves or in a comment on television, in a sudden vision or a song playing on the radio. I realized that what had initially been just a gateway now encompassed my whole world. It came with me everywhere I went. It was a part of me.

How could I have forgotten? It had come back to me unexpectedly in a dirty old apartment. There it was suddenly back in my life—unbeckoned, given freely. A part of me retrieved with no effort. There was magic in the world once more.

No, I thought. *It had never left*. Only my sight was given back to me.

An Angel in a Bookstore

A million thoughts and ideas flew through my tired mind as I walked down Mount Royal in Montreal, not one of them related to the upcoming exams

that would decide whether or not I would graduate. This was my third and final year in microbiology. I should have been eager and motivated to give it my all, one last time. But I had reached a saturation point. I had nothing left in me to give. Would this year never end? I couldn't join the rest of the recluses in the library, studying useless facts about protein synthesis in bacteria. It would be time wasted. I needed a break.

I looked up and found myself in front of the university bookstore. As if moved by an unseen force, I opened the door and climbed the stairs to the second floor. Finally, the sounds and smells of civilization! The slightly dusty smell of books, the coarseness of espresso, the excited chatter as cups clinked in the nearby café . . . I walked down an aisle and grabbed a book at random, hurrying toward an empty armchair by the window. It was only when I got to the chair that I saw what I had picked up. It was a book about extraordinary occurrences of angels in everyday life.

The busy bookstore and café were hushed to a throbbing murmur as I plunged into the amazing stories of real-life miracles. I read tales of extraordinary rescues, road signs appearing magically to indicate the road to a nearby hospital, chance encounters that changed lives . . . Time stood still. I just could not tear myself away from this book! I felt such relief wash over me. Where was it coming from?

I had just spent days, nights, weeks, months cramming information into my tired little brain. It analyzed, memorized, synthesized, calculated . . . all for the glory of science. I realized suddenly how parched I was for something greater than logic and scientific rigor. What about love and spirit and humanity and godliness? How could science have become so divorced from them? Could we ever have knowledge without spirit? Ambition without passion? Yearning without love? Science was so cut and dry, irrefutable, fact-filled. The university was teaching me to shuffle these pieces of knowledge around, rotating them to make them fit into theories and

hypotheses. Where was the creativity in all this? Could anyone truly experience genius without reaching within themselves into the divine part of their being?

I had attended classes in biology, immunology, biochemistry, genetics. Each had focused on the mechanics of things, how we thought things worked. Where was the wonderment about it all? The acclamation of God in his tiniest creations? No one marveled at the complexity and genius of life. They only dissected it down to the smallest part possible so they could put it back together again. But the truth was that no matter how rigorously you studied the building blocks of life, you could never put them back together and behold the flow of life. This was not the prerogative of science. It was the domain of God. Without God, without Spirit, these studies were futile, pointless. I had always felt that something was missing from it all. This book I was holding had reconnected me to the spirit dimension. And all of a sudden I felt comforted. It all didn't seem so pointless anymore.

The bookstore became the chapel where I could reconnect with Spirit while trying to survive the tedium of my studies. Whereas classes taught me the "facts," reading books on spirituality gave me a context, a point. Most others saw the point in the pursuit of research and the furthering of knowledge. But without Spirit, knowledge was just random information. It could never be wisdom. And I wanted no less. Sitting in the bookstore became my lifeline. I needed to connect to something greater than myself, to the essence that manifested itself in these very things I was studying. Without it, my life made no sense.

I became a bookstore junkie. A world of wonderment had opened up in front of me, and I became addicted to this new way of getting in touch with something higher than myself. I started going to the bookstore every day. I perused the shelves, in search of the lesson of the day. These books were like a million teachers, spanning across time and space, to reach me in my

mundane little life. I read texts on African women preachers and on quantum physics and more on angel messengers. One day, a title stood out more than the others: *Ask Your Angels*.[2] I brought it home with me and delved into it.

It began with a simple meditation called grounding. This book had grabbed my attention in such a peculiar way that I felt I was meant to really pay attention to what it was saying. I sat on the floor in my room and closed my eyes, breathing deeply and rhythmically. I had never meditated before, and I was amazed at how easily I was able to focus my mind. I followed the steps to the grounding meditation, which is the first step in the angel communication process explained in the book. I let my mind float carefree as I pictured roots going down from my spine and legs into the cool, rich earth.

Once there, I drew up the sparkling crystals of nourishment the earth had to offer and let them fill every inch of my body. I was parched for this energy, and I drank it in like someone who had just spent years in the desert. As I reveled in this new light, I started pulling it upward to different centers of my body. Each energy center felt different, and without effort I started seeing images and hearing bits of sentences. For the first time in my life I was receiving wisdom that came neither from books nor from formal teachings. It came from experience. My experience. This wisdom came through my body and through the earth and through the energy of the universe. A new dimension was opening up for me.

The next day I returned to the bookstore. My vision was changed. I felt a profound serenity. The colors around me were brighter. I could hear everything without being overwhelmed by it all. My breathing was even. I felt so peaceful that the fact that I lost my wallet that day did not jar me. I merely observed that it was missing and went about the process of finding it.

I felt none of the usual stresses and anxiety that I was so prone to. I felt the world.

It was in this state of openness that I walked down an aisle in the bookstore and picked up the book that would turn my journey around.

I walked over to the spirituality/New Age section. I let my fingertips linger over the books as I walked. I had just finished my exams the week before. I had all the time in the world. I was filled with that glorious feeling of youth and summer vacation. My fingers stopped and I took a look: *Book of Shadows* by Phyllis Curott, Wiccan High Priestess.

I had never heard of Wicca or Paganism. I picked up the book and went to sit in the bookstore's café. I had spent innumerable hours here, cramming for exams. It felt so good to be able to sit quietly and read whatever I wanted. I opened the book and started reading. I was plunged into a woman's journey as she discovered the magic of a new-old religion called Wicca. I was with her as she found her way to a magic store and joined other women and celebrated her femininity in ritual, as she conjured magic and awakened an untapped power deep within, the power of the Goddess. I followed her as she became a Witch.

I realized then that there was nothing I wanted more. I wanted to lead rituals and feel magic in the world. I wanted to worship the sacred image of myself through the Goddess. I wanted to feel connected to the universe and worship the sanctity of nature. I wanted to feel the rhythms of the earth and walk the world in pure awareness. I wanted to be a Witch.

I held the book close to my heart. Books are the vehicle of stories and fairy tales. They tell the tales of other people.

But what if ? . . . I thought. *What if the magic could happen to me?*

Maybe I could join a group at a distance, a group like the one this woman had joined. Maybe I could do some distance courses . . .

I sat at my computer and I entered the words: classes, Witchcraft, and Paganism.

Crescent Moon School of Magic and Paganism
Ste-Catherine Street West . . . Montreal . . .

I stared blankly. I had lived around the corner for two years, and I'd never noticed the little magic shop. It was there, right around the corner. I could not believe my eyes. I could meet others, learn about magic, celebrate the Goddess and the cycles of nature. I could dance around a circle and lift my hands up high in praise. I could be a Witch.

Now, I had to ask myself a serious question.

Did I dare?

A Goddess Made of Clay

There was no doubt. I was afraid.

It was right there at my fingertips. All the magic and beauty I'd always wanted. What if it was really a strange cult, waiting to get me? What if I lost myself in it? Worst of all: What if God disapproved and cursed me forever? Was I willing to take a chance on this? I disagreed deeply with many of the positions of the church on gender and homosexuality, the place of women, and other political stances. Yet the voice of doom kept booming in my ears. Concepts that I'd cast away, like hell and sin, came sneaking back into my life. What if I was being seduced by an image of beauty and that heathen image was taking me away from the one true faith? I knew logically that it was ridiculous. I did not believe in a vengeful God. But the propaganda of the church was effective. I was afraid.

For weeks I debated. I called the school and asked questions. The teacher seemed very nice. The new semester for level one was starting the next day. I

had to make a choice.

I took a lump of clay and started to fiddle with it to relieve my anxiety. I tried to make a cup, a gnome, a flower, but nothing worked. The anxiety was flowing all the way down to my fingernails, and the clay refused to cooperate.

In frustration, I banged the lump of clay on the table and stared at it blindly. As my gaze started to focus, I saw her face. She was veiled, sitting on a mountaintop. Her veil covered her head and went down to drape the mountain itself, so that she seemed to be one with the mountain. I started to clean out the lines of the clay, making each curve smoother, each crevice more defined. Line by line, stroke by stroke, the Goddess entered my world. I took her in my hand, and looking at her I made a decision. I would learn more about her. I joined Crescent Moon.

[1]. T. Lobsang Rampa, *Les Secrets de l'Aura* (Paris: Éditions J'ai Lu, 1971).
[2]. Alma Daniel, Timothy Wyllie, and Andrew Ramer, *Ask Your Angels* (New York: Ballantine, 1992).

Chapter 2

The Search: Introduction to a Paradox

First Steps

"You must be Adelina."

A young woman with long, curly hair smiled at me. She was wearing a T-shirt and faded jeans and sporting a pair of sneakers. No black fingernails, dark makeup, long robes. I looked around the room: there was a young woman with glasses and frizzy hair, another woman my age, a young man who could be Indian, and a huge fellow with long hair.

No goth queens, no vampires, no hags . . . I was almost disappointed. But at least I could breathe a little better.

I soon understood why the teacher knew my name. Everyone here knew each other. Unlike me, they were already practicing Pagans; they had read all the classics and were familiar with the Pagan community. They were taking classes to cement what they already knew. I was starting from scratch.

I sat down, waiting for the class to start. Across the room I heard one of the young women burst out laughing. "Don't beat yourself up about it," she told her neighbor. "After all, we're not Christian."

I cowered in my chair. I knew that nothing was meant by the remark, and I did not take it personally. But I had no intention at this point of

broadcasting my Christianity.

I didn't want to bring up my Christian beliefs for two major reasons. First of all, I knew full well that many of these people had been hurt, as I had been, by one form or another of Christianity. Many had rebelled against a confining, narrow-minded Christian upbringing and had chosen Paganism as a way of fulfilling themselves. For many, Christianity was synonymous with patriarchy, the degradation of women, sexual repression, and the rejection of anything and anyone that does not fit into the established order. I completely understood why someone would want to reject such an institution. I didn't want to bring all that back into their sacred havens. I had made a clear distinction in my mind between the church as a political institution and the teachings of Christ. Often the two did not match, and I felt no obligation to follow the dictates of a church that did not follow Christ's teachings of love and humility. But this was not the time and place to get into a philosophical argument on the divide between church and faith.

The second reason for my remaining "in the Christian closet" was because of the historical treatment of Witches by the church. As I learned more about Paganism, I came to know more about what are called the "burning times." During the Inquisition, countless men and women were tried, tortured, and brutally murdered on counts of Witchcraft. They were tried by a biased tribunal of priests and bishops who coerced testimonies under torture. Often, hearsay of suspect behavior (like healing someone! . . .) would be sufficient to arrest women and interrogate them. Under torture, they would confess to devil worship or sorcery and be sentenced to death by burning or drowning. A whole manual was written by the church on the method of investigating a Witch. It was an optional reading for class, but I could not stomach it.

I was very aware that this was a shameful part of my heritage. I had joined Pagan circles to celebrate femininity; my church had spent centuries

trying to eradicate it. The people in this room had full rights to hate everything I represented. Maybe I could give some reparation for what had been done. Until this moment, the atrocities of the unholy Inquisition had had nothing to do with me. They were merely a page in a history book. As I became involved with Paganism and Witchcraft, they became part of *my* story. It was just another reason to really make a split in my head between the political institution and the spiritual heritage that is Christianity. It strengthened my resolve to discard whatever bigotry was diffused by the church and to focus on the core of what it meant to be Christian. I was here to meet the Goddess and celebrate her mysteries through ritual and magic. Christianity would have to wait.

Working the Magic

"Pair up with someone. We are going to work on sensing energy fields and on shielding today. You will get the chance to work with everyone, so you can see how different people have different ways of manipulating energy. First off, sit in front of your partner. Simply sense their energy. What images, feelings do you get from them?"

We were a month into our study of Witchcraft and Paganism, and this was our second class in energy work. We had practiced the basics: centering, grounding, and sensing our own energy fields. We had expanded and shrunk our energy fields and felt each other's fields. I now sat in front of Karen. I centered and grounded. Then I opened my center to her field. My head was filled with a bright fuchsia-pink color. I smiled. A big Easter egg.

"All right, everyone. Now, you will shield yourselves. Each person is responsible for half the shield. You are to connect your shields in the middle. Make sure the seams are tightly secured and that there are no energy leaks."

I sat in front of Nina this time. We knew each other well, and we had similar energy signatures. We slowly set up our ends of the shields. I could

feel the energy moving toward the center, dancing back and forth, not knowing what to do. I could sense different colors waving back and forth. Steadily. Slowly. We adjusted our speed and size of shields so that they covered us completely. Great!

"Last task: you will combine your energies to create a uniform shield."

I was standing in front of Eva. She had a knack for manipulating energy. She was a natural. You could almost feel a breeze in your hair when she set up to cast a circle, moved her energy field, or even just grounded and centered. She took me up by storm. I could hear her in my head, saying, "Come on now, don't be shy. Just do it. Give me what you've got." I awkwardly got myself together and gave her what I could muster. She really didn't need very much. She did a perfectly good job in shielding both of us at once.

It was all very new to me. I had joined the Crescent Moon School of Magic and Paganism mostly for the religious aspect, to rediscover the feminine aspect of the Divine and to celebrate nature in its diverse forms. Yes, I'd had experiences with energy and some strange unexplained occurrences, and I believed in the concept of energy. But . . .

I was perplexed. I could stretch out my hand and say someone's energy field ended there. I had impressions of color and some vague synchronicities at times with people. Who could say what it all meant? I could live on faith alone, but wasn't this stretching it a little bit?

Joyce, one of our teachers, looked up from the front of the room. I looked back at her and shook my head. "What is it?" she asked.

"I don't know about all this, Joyce. I want to believe it, but who's to say it's not all in my head?"

She looked back at me knowingly, smiling. "It *is* all in your head."

I felt an immense sense of relief flow through me at that moment. Why did I feel so free? She had just confirmed my worst fear! She'd just said that I

was making it all up. It made no sense!

Ha! There was the key: it made *no sense*.

We live in a world of logic. The Age of Enlightenment has drilled into us the glory of science and the scientific method. In such a world, there is little room for subjective things. Such things have been relegated to the realm of fantasy or psychopathology. All my formal education has been in the biological sciences, and I believe in the rigor of the scientific method. It is, however, a very poor tool to evaluate non-tangible phenomena. Logic falls quite short in matters of faith and occult exploration.

So, here was the realization of that glorious day:

It is not because it is in your head that it is not real.

Magic taught me the power of imagination, the most underrated of human abilities. I'm not simply talking about the ability to build tales of valiant knights and mythic creatures. The faculty of imagination is much more than that. The word stems from the word *image*. It is the ability to produce an image where there was none before. I am talking here about the pure process of creation, not merely the mechanical process of putting together existing pieces in order to produce something new. At this level of processing, words become inadequate, and the only way we may hope to obtain some kind of understanding is through archetypal images floating through our intuition—a dawning of consciousness that we can't really express. A gnosis.

With the advent of exciting new developments in the field of physics, the combination of imagination and logic is yielding great results. A new era of imaginative consciousness is dawning, and with it the acknowledgment of our magical practices. The bottom line is this: imagination is not fake, it is not wishful thinking. Imagination is powerful beyond our wildest dreams. It

is the source of all creation, the source of all magic. And we were born with it.

We are the center of the universe. The world is created and re-created every instant through our beliefs and our intent.

The kingdom of God is inside you, and it is outside of you . . .
Split the wood and I am there. Turn the stone, and you will find me.

—The Gospel of Thomas (part of the Nag Hammadi library)

The Fool's Way

I climbed up the stairs two at a time to the third-floor studio where our classes were held. Walking into the building was part of the ritual. The smells of incense and oils and the particular wave of vibrating heat always washed over me, marking the transition from the world outside to the world inside. Something was different today. I could also smell challenge in the air. My shoulders shot back, my senses sharpened . . . What would happen to us?

I drew back the curtain that served as the entryway to our sacred space, and I saw three long tables draped with long white sheets. I could see vague outlines of objects underneath. My classmates were seated. We looked at each other knowingly. Our teachers were seated, looking well pleased. Bad sign. We'd had other classes like this, where we'd had to protect ourselves against assault, protect others, test our energy. One of my classmates retreated to her bubble to focus. Another was jittery, stealing furtive looks. What challenge would await us today?

"There are fourteen hidden objects on these tables," my teacher said. "Take a paper and a pencil. For each one, we ask you to sense the energy of the object and to report your observations."

All right. We took different positions at the table to be able to work comfortably. Our warden stood tall in a corner, protecting us clumsy younglings from drawing too much attention to ourselves from eager predators on the outside. I felt safe. I approached the first object. I saw my friends bring their hands close to the objects to sense their vibration. *That seems like a good idea*, I thought. I brought my own hands to the first object.

Nothing. Just a dead, inert piece of something. I feel nothing at all. OK. I'm panicking. Another confirmation that I am making it all up in my head. I have no gift. This is all a big joke. What am I going to tell the others? When will it all be over? This is it. I've been uncovered: the Imposter!

Ground. Focus. Get a grip. Trust.

How do I pierce the mystery of this object? I know there is a way. This is your task. Forget the others. How do I do it? I use my hands every day for cooking, working. They aren't sensitive enough to pick up anything. That's not me. I want to get into this object, into its very fiber. All I've got separating me from it is a piece of cloth. How do I remove this barrier?

Hold on. I'm wrong. There is nothing separating me from this object. My body is as much empty space as it is matter. Solidity of matter is an illusion, the same way that the distance between the object and me is an illusion. We are one and the same. And it is through my center that I will vibrate close enough to the object to know more about it. We can be one and the same. This how I need to do this.

I approached the object again. I saw my center glow with an aqua light and I poured myself into it, shutting out the notion that the object was far away from me. Distance was an illusion.

An image formed in my head. I heard pub songs and laughter. I could smell beer in the air. What was this? It seemed unlikely that these images had anything to do with what my teachers had placed in front of me. Anyhow, no time to ponder. Let's move on.

I tried again with the next object. I heard a voice: *pile of rocks*. It was a clear, monotone voice, unquestioning.

And so it went for each object: red hair flowing in the wind, a running child, a flock of geese taking flight, a dragon, a woman holding an object close to her heart . . .

We came back to share our impressions for each object. As I related the images that I had gotten, my teachers' jaws started to drop. Something was going on in the room, but they wouldn't disclose the objects until we had all finished sharing. Being all very tired from the exercise, we took a short break. Our warden took me aside while the others were going downstairs. He took me to the side of one of the tables. He lifted the cover and took out a large wrought-iron cloak pin. He looked at me and said, "I wore this at the Highland games last year. And believe me, there was an awful lot of beer and pub songs flowing." My breath caught in my throat. He then took me to another station. "These are stones that we brought back from our last coven gathering. You got an accurate image for most of these objects. How did you do it?"

I walked back to my car in a complete daze. There was no denying that something had just happened, and I knew that I would never be able to write it off as insignificant or coincidental. For the first time, I had proof. All this time I had engaged in the fool's way. I had lived with the fear that what I experienced and what I cherished was completely bogus and that I could fall flat on my face and wake up from my illusions with a severe headache and an empty heart. This was such a lonely place to be, for if people knew that we were casting spells and conjuring charms, we'd get a nice ride to the nearest clinic. The only thing I had to pull me through was absolute faith. Complete trust. I had to accept suspending criticism for a time until I had enough evidence to convince myself that I was not a fool after all.

When I wonder why I get involved in this way of life, when I doubt it at all (and it does happen), I think back to certain events, like that challenge in class, and I know that I am not running after a pink elephant. I am a fool no more.

Magic: Dealing with the Contradictions

As the semester continued, I learned more about elements, spellcasting, ritual building, magical symbols, and tools. The position of the Roman Catholic Church on the topic of magic is quite clear:

> 2117 All practices of *magic* or *sorcery*, by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one's service and have a supernatural power over others—even if this were for the sake of restoring their health—are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion. These practices are even more to be condemned when accompanied by the intention of harming someone, or when they have recourse to the intervention of demons. Wearing charms is also reprehensible. *Spiritism* often implies divination or magical practices; the Church for her part warns the faithful against it. Recourse to so-called traditional cures does not justify either the invocation of evil powers or the exploitation of another's credulity.[1]

The lack of explanation as to why magic is reprehensible makes it difficult to argue for or against such a position. One thing was clear to me at this point: Witchcraft was incompatible with Catholicism as traditionally taught. Yet it was not difficult for me to reconcile my faith and the practice of the Craft. Stark contradictions exist in the edicts of the Catholic Church regarding supernatural phenomena.

Catholicism is not completely foreign to the concept of the unseen. The Holy Spirit is the invisible component of the Holy Trinity, the messenger of faith and the holy fire that stirs the imagination and the will. Article 99 of the Catechism states: "Thanks to its supernatural sense of faith, the People of God as a whole never ceases to welcome, to penetrate more deeply and to live more fully from the gift of divine Revelation." It does not deny our ability to sense the intangible and to relate personally to God through the "supernatural."

The discourse on magic seems to be stalled yet again by a problem in semantics. What is magic? If it is a "supernatural sense of faith" in the Divine, and if its presence can be felt and worshipped all around us, then we are quite close to the definition of magic that most Witches practice.

The church's own norms of practice betray its belief in the existence of magic. It has already been established that the use of supernatural powers is condemned "even if this were for the sake of restoring their health." Miraculous healing, however, weighs heavily in the decision to declare someone a saint. Pope John Paul II and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints issued norms in 1983 that are to be observed by bishops when making inquiries into the authenticity of a request for canonization.[2] In these norms of practice, a detailed procedure is included to investigate miracles of healing. The use of supernatural powers for healing is not condemned by the authorities. On the contrary, it seems in some cases that it is highly regarded, worthy of the greatest honors.

Magic . . . miracles . . . semantics once more. I could put this worry to rest.

Magic: Theory and Practice

As I tried to synthesize all that I had learned about magic, it became apparent that basic magical theory is extremely simple. Yet its true

application is worthy of the greatest spiritual masters.

Magic has two major components:
The Will and The Word.

The Will is our personal desire, or motivation, to see the object of our magic come to pass in reality. It is a verb, a desire in action. It rises up from the very center of our being and creates in the world the object of our desire. It is not merely a want for something. To want something implies that we are, in some measure, lacking it. We then sit passively in a state of lack, in a state of want. But when you "will" something, you are never lacking in anything, for the minute you conjure up will, you create that which you wanted. It is already yours.

I had been using magic for a while and had learned the theory. The depth of the experience eluded me still. As with most of the great lessons in my life, I understood this concept in the most mundane of ways.

The front passenger door of our car had not opened in weeks. One day I got fed up with riding in the back seat. I put the key in the lock and decided that I was going to sit in the front seat. I simply turned the key and, through sheer force of will, the door opened. It was on that day that I realized how difficult it is to do magic.

The example itself might seem simple enough: insert key and turn. But the real key was not in my hand. The key was my *will.* For a split second, I had no doubt that the door would open. Not a shadow of a doubt. You will hear critics of magic say, "If magic was real, all those who pretend to use it would win the lottery and live the rich life." I believe that if someone can achieve sufficient will to win the lottery, he or she will win it. It is not sufficient, however, to say "I want to win the lottery." You have to be able to say "I will win the lottery" with absolute conviction. It goes as far as feeling

no surprise whatsoever when you do win. *No* surprise. No "Oh my God, I can't believe it!" Nothing.

I don't have that kind of will for winning the lottery. I know no sane person who does either. But this kind of will is the foundation for magic. Pure will. This is the most difficult part of magic. It is not walking around a circle in a clockwise motion and waving a short sword over a cup. It is first and foremost the Will.

Maybe a note on ethics is appropriate at this time. It is not because you *can* will something to happen that you *should*. As a Witch and as an enlightened being, you have a responsibility to protect the world from harm. With power comes responsibility to work for the betterment of humanity. This is not to say that magic for personal gain is necessarily bad. We must be able to support ourselves physically and financially to continue our work on Earth. If winning a large sum of money means that you will be able to put forth a project that will help the whole community, how can this be bad? However, as humans we have a very narrow view of existence. We tend to see ourselves as the center of our private universe. This makes it hard to be really objective on the full outcome of our magical work. From this vantage point, magic that causes "no harm" can easily become magic that "causes no harm to me"—and sorry to whoever happens to float in the way! Even without intending to harm anyone, it is easy to keep our blinders on and put "*our* good" before "the common good." So, we have to work magic with our eyes wide open and with complete honesty.

Blessings come from the Great Source. The ethical Witch will put her request to the Divine and add that no harm may come to pass due to her request. If someone else's life may be saved by winning money, then may it be so. The laws of karma are then clean and you have acted according to your will and the will of creation. So now you are aware. Be careful what you will for.

All you need is will. There is no more to say about it. It is so simple, and yet it is impossible for us to fathom. And this can't be taught. You can only be made aware of its importance and its effects. Jesus taught that if we have faith the size of a mustard seed, we could uproot trees. This was not merely a metaphor for the importance of putting our faith in God. It is the essence of will. I believe he meant this in the most concrete of terms. When you truly believe that you influence the world, the world responds in kind.

One Blue Moon

The very air in the room was burning my skin. I felt as giddy as a little girl. I wore my new wool tunic, work of my hands, and a blue veil covered my head. I felt echoes of a distant Passover dinner, maybe, in a different life. All of us dressed for a feast, busying ourselves to prepare offerings and cleanse the room for this sacred occasion. Eva was our host this night. There were also Sara and Candace from class and one of Eva's friends who had come to assist us. We didn't formally speak of a coven, but we all knew that we were building something together, whatever its name might be.

It was a blue moon in August and the skies were clear. Eva had asked us to assist her in the dedication of her sword. After we had blessed it, we passed papers around to write down our petitions. I took the paper and laid it down in front of me.

I hated this moment. Whenever someone would ask me what I would want out of a spell, I was always at a loss. I was not in need of anything. I had a loving man in my life. My family was well and healthy. We were comfortable in our new house. I enjoyed my work and had a group of great friends. A new realm of magic was opening up to me in a way I could only have dreamed of. What could I ask for?

The circle was tight with energy. I could feel the presence of my guides around me, blessing me. I breathed in the magic and the beauty of the

moment. I picked up my pen and wrote, *That things may stay the way they are*.

Things did not stay the way they were. The coordinator position that I got the week after the ritual fell through in the first week of October. And the pregnancy that we celebrated in September was lost by Thanksgiving.

My request could have been: *That love continue to fill my life* or *That magic may continue to grow in and around me, that my work continue to bring me satisfaction*. Instead, the things that the universe had already set in motion for me were abruptly halted.

Once you have a will for something, you must formulate your request. As my example shows, this is as important as strengthening your will toward a cause. It requires the beautiful faculty of imagination that is so vital in magic. You must see exactly the form of what it is you will to happen. The universe processes a lot of requests. It tends to prefer the ones that are clear and easily understood.

The Word does not only relate to the spoken or written word. It is a way of describing the form you want your will to take. Will is like a ruby red wine. You cannot have it unless it is in some sort of container. Imagine wine being poured into a glass. Will, like the wine, takes the shape of the container you give it. It is accessible to you in its new, functional form. The universe can then serve it for you, exactly the way you want it.

Withdrawal

I understood magic, and I knew that with practice I would grow and learn more. I was building a magical identity slowly, surrounding myself with my symbols and reading the language of the universe as it surrounded me. But the shadowy figure standing in the doorway would not go away.

I sat fidgeting in front of my altar, unable to concentrate. I had completed all the required coursework and exercises for my level one at

Crescent Moon School. The third and final part was approaching and I was dreading it: gods and goddesses. We were to go through the main deity figures in different cultures in order to find a god and a goddess that were our own. We had to research the associations with these deity figures and the mythology associated with them. They would become our guiding principles, our sources of inspiration, and our allies on our path. We would present them in a ritual and ask for their blessing in front of our classmates. I hadn't told anyone about my continued Christian affiliations, but I could keep my cover no longer. I was now busted.

I looked at my altar. It was completely empty. I could never make up my mind about what to put on it. When I was doing magic, I usually put up a representation of the elements and that was it. But there were none of the usual objects: no pentacle, no deity representation, no wand, no athame. I had been telling myself that the emptiness was a way of representing that I was keeping my options open. However, in the mood I was in right now, it was a painful reminder of how much I lacked a true core in my beliefs.

I loved each new discovery in magic and energy work, the connectedness with nature, and the participation in ritual. But choosing deity figures from mythological pantheons was beyond what I could live with. Should I choose a pair of deities that looked interesting—research them, pretend profound devotion—so that I could go on with my studies undetected? How would others react if I told them that I found mythology interesting, laden with useful moral lessons and metaphors, but that to me that's all it was: mythology? I couldn't stand in ritual and invoke Isis' help and guidance. It meant nothing to me. I felt like a cheat and an imposter.

I was to be married in little over one month. I was about to receive a sacrament of the Catholic Church in front of my family, friends, and community. I was still trying to justify to myself the harmlessness of my

newfound passion for Witchcraft. Adding worship to a new deity form was more than my fragile psyche could endure at the moment.

I looked out the window at the sky. What was God, and what did he want from me? This was not a quest that I could set on right now.

I picked up the phone and called my teacher. I withdrew from Crescent Moon.

I had come to a point where I had to make clear in my head what was important to me. There were three choices available to me: (1) go back to a purely Christian practice, (2) become completely Pagan, or (3) integrate the two traditions into a uniform practice, one that could stand trial to any contradiction that I could be faced with. I could not live without Jesus, and Pagan philosophy had become an inherent part of my daily life. I had no choice but to do my best to integrate my faith, hoping that I would not lose my mind in the process.

I first had to define what it meant for me to be a Witch and what it meant for me to be Christian.

What Is a Witch?

There are probably as many definitions of Witchcraft as there are Witches. The word *Witch* is derived from the Germanic root *wic*, which means "to bend." A Witch is therefore a person who bends or shapes the world using magic. The word is also linked to the Old English term *wicce*, meaning "wise one." Thus, Witchcraft is the craft of the wise.

Pagani is a Latin term for country dwellers, those close to the earth. Historically, country dwellers who retained their folklore and devotions to the land came to be known as *Pagans*. As the unholy Inquisition took hold of Europe, most practitioners of the Craft were pushed underground. It was not until the 1950s that information on Witchcraft started to filter out of England, mainly through the publications of Gerald Gardner. A number of

individuals came forth, claiming to have a direct line of knowledge from traditional Witches. These individuals started their own traditions, giving initiations to a select few and passing on their knowledge. This was the beginning of the modern interest in Witchcraft, or what is now called *Wicca*.

One of these individuals, Raymond Buckland, a disciple of Gardner, brought his teachings to America. Covens and traditions started to spring up throughout the world, starting a Neo-Pagan revolution. This history is marked with many squabbles over the legitimacy of traditions and the validity of initiations. Scott Cunningham's work on solitary practice brought about a change in the elitist view of Witchcraft and brought a new acknowledgment of the solitary practitioner, which had until then been considered as illegitimate by practitioners of organized traditions. From then on, Witchcraft became more widely accessible, and with this new momentum a series of books, groups, and associations saw the light. Yet it still remains a widely unregimented practice.

Witchcraft, in my use of the word, encompasses a wide range of mythology and religious practices, a veneration of all nature, and the use of magic to effect change. The magic practiced in Witchcraft is very much akin to the magic of the crone of old, in her cottage in the woods. It uses spellcasting, charging of objects as charms, and the concoction of potions, to name a few techniques. It is very much earth based, using the earth energies and the cycles of the moon to manifest change. I love to ritualize on a whim in the light of the moon or under a particularly beautiful tree. I love to smell the wind for signs of things to come. I love to throw my hands up in the air and give thanks to the powers that are for my blessings. That is my practice and that is why I have affinities for Witchcraft.

A Witch walks the world in complete awareness. The whole world is her sacred sanctuary, and through the world she is connected to all that is. She sees in nature the expression of the Divine and she communes with it

directly. She is her own Priestess. She has the gift of Sight, for she knows that there is much that the eyes don't see. She gains wisdom from all manners of unseen guides in the silence of her inner sanctuary. And always she gives thanks to the Creative Force that sustains our world—the God and the Goddess, whose love manifests in the bounty of the land. She follows the monthly cycle of the moon and the yearly cycle of the sun, for these are manifestations of her Lord and Lady. She performs rituals and conjures magic under moonlit skies, ever mindful of the Wiccan Rede: "An you harm none, do what you will." (*An*, in this old sense of the word, means "if.") She is a seeker of wisdom and of peace within. The Charge of the Goddess is clear: "Know that if what thou seekest, thou findest not within, thou shall not find it without." We are all connected by the mystery of the Web of Life. What makes one stronger and wiser and joyful, makes all so.

In summary

A Witch worships the God and the Goddess.

She venerates the gods and goddesses of ancient-world pantheons.

She performs magic in the form of spells and rituals.

She considers all of nature to be sacred.

She walks between the worlds, the tangible one and the universal unseen.

She can be part of a coven or a tradition, or work as a solitary.

She follows the Wiccan Rede, the Threefold Law, and the Charge of the Goddess, which reminds us that "thy seeking and yearning will avail thee not, unless thou knowest the mystery: that if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, then thou wilt never find it without thee. For behold, I have been with thee from the beginning; and I am that which is attained at the end of desire."[3]

What Does It Mean to Be Christian?

The word *Christian* is an adjective; it means "of Christ." Traditionally, this means being baptized into one of the branches of Christianity. The three biggest branches of Christianity are Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism; these divisions have arisen through conflicts in dogma. Charismatic churches have also sprung up throughout the world. Many people are going back to a more familial type of group worship based on revelation and the study of the Scriptures. Some groups have also stemmed from a charismatic leader who, having received divine revelation, set out on apostolic missions to spread the new gospel he had received.

I thought that defining what it means to be a Witch was going to be the hard part of this exercise. After all, there are no official institutions to regulate the Craft. But defining what it means to be Christian in this day and age proves to be infinitely more difficult. Politics and social propaganda obscure the spiritual core of Christianity. There are so many denominations and so many beliefs, rules, and dictates that divide us as Christians. These rules have very little to do, as far as I am concerned, with the Christian faith itself. Jesus himself rebuked those who followed the law blindly, without consideration for what was right and loving. The Christianity that is close to my heart belongs to a simpler time.

Simply put, Christians are those who follow the teachings of Christ. Christ came to the humble and the unlearned. He did not come only to the wise and the powerful. That is because God's teachings are simple. They can be grasped by all of us, without intercession. Jesus taught us about God in the most fundamental way, in a way unclogged by philosophy. Like little children, he told us stories so that we might learn by example, so that we would not forget his most important teachings. He reminds us that it is in simplicity that we meet God, in a state of complete humility. Had it been otherwise, wouldn't Jesus himself have come to us in full glory, completely

revealed in his godly state? Wouldn't his precursor and kin, John, have trampled the Temple with his followers and demanded submission from the High Priest himself ? The teachings of Jesus are simple indeed. Following his instructions is what makes us Christians, disciples of Christ.

Jesus taught us humility and love above all. Humility is what allows us to put others' needs before our own. When we serve others in this manner, we allow compassion to spread like a wildfire throughout the earth.

Jesus taught us to be free and unattached so that we may follow the Spirit wherever it leads us.

He taught us to love without discrimination.

He taught us to fight for what is right and to live with passion.

He taught us to keep our eyes open and to keep an open mind. In the simplicity of our hearts lies the truth. In this sacred space, our Lord whispers to us. These private conversations overrule all laws and dictates thrown at us by the authorities. He taught us through his own life. He followed his truth at the expense of the Laws of the Elders, causing him to have many enemies among the Jewish authorities. He passed on this truth to his church, to us who believe in him and follow his truth. We are his church. The only "laws" we are bound to are the laws of love that we have been taught. He taught us to respect life and that the value of this life was irrespective of rank, gender, religion, ethnicity, or religious decree. The teachings are simple. This is all we need to live by.

So, who will lead us? The only source we can trust is Jesus himself. At the very beginning, the church lived on the revelation of its disciples. It had no texts of law or dogma. It grew from revelation. We have to look to the past to reclaim what it used to mean to be Christian. We had just received the wisdom of our Lord; we still remembered the sound of his voice and his teachings were still fresh in our minds. Back then, we used to gather in a

simple place in remembrance of the greatness that had transformed our lives.

How do we get back to that essence? Who can we trust to tell us the way it used to be, the way Jesus wanted it all to become? Because, in the end, that is *all* that matters. In our own inner sanctum, stripped of our own worldly pursuits, with our hearts wide open, we can still recognize the voice of our Lord. We still remember.

A New Creed

What is it that I believe, deep in my core? What parts of Christianity are non-negotiable for me? What is my "apostles' creed"?

I believe in the Almighty, who created all there is.

I believe that he sent Jesus to teach us about him and so he may learn about us.

In order to do this, Jesus was born of a woman, a mission she chose freely and with full knowledge.

Jesus, God as man, embraced humanity completely.

Jesus taught us to love above all and to live with an open heart.

He died on a cross and was resurrected from the dead, symbol of hope and that life stands above all, even death.

His reign will come again so that we may be reunited with our Source.

He sent his Holy Spirit to walk with us and guide us always.

In the Christ light, we are all brothers and sisters. We gather around the teachings of the saints, those who knew him and understood his teachings, so that they may be kept alive in faith. And in this light, death shall not prevail.

[1]. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997).
[2]. See the apostolic constitution *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*, issued in January 1983, as well as the "New Laws for the Causes of Saints" promulgated by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints a few weeks later. Both texts are available on the Vatican's website, http://www.vatican.va/.
[3]. I strongly encourage you to read the full text of the Charge of the Goddess. The version of the Charge adapted by Doreen Valiente is available in many books. See, for example, Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999).

Chapter 3

The Merging: Dealing with the Contradictions

A Year and a Day

I entered the square and walked around it in a clockwise motion. This was one of my sacred spaces. There was something about it, as if it were invisible to the world outside. There was always a special glow of light that changed colors suddenly and without explanation. Eight tall trees lined one side of the square. Four small trees stood guard on each quarter, my guardians. Around me the world continued to bustle, cars speeding on the busy boulevard and people walking by in a hurry. But once I stepped into the shade of the trees, the wind itself changed. The light changed color and sound was dampened, as if I had just walked into a ring of fog. Although I stood in bright daylight, I felt no one could see me. I was between the worlds.

I recalled the day that I had withdrawn from Crescent Moon School. My head had been a mess. I had just finished my first year of occupational therapy and was working part-time as an occupational-therapy assistant. I had been planning my wedding and organizing our new apartment. Family was coming from overseas. There was a lot on my mind. I couldn't deal with

the questions I knew I had to face: What is God? What do I believe? How do I reconcile my faith with the workings of the church? How do I fit in the practice of my religion with Witchcraft, and how do I express it in my daily life without confusing everyone, including myself ? How do I stay true to it all? I could not walk into a church without feeling a certain unease in my chest. Although I knew that I was doing nothing wrong, it had been too much to deal with psychologically. I had to take a step back.

I felt different now. I was settled in to my new life. I had completed my second year, and I was looking forward to a summer of clinical rotations. The weather was beautiful. I felt stronger. I was no longer a child. I had left my parents' house and was now in charge of a household. I was also responsible for my patients' well-being. I had faced the challenges of my new life and I was victorious. I felt a new confidence. Over the past year I had gained a powerful ally: faith. Faith that I can survive anything. No matter how dark things got, I kept my hope and faith alive and lived with the knowledge that the darkness would blow over. And it did. Armed with this weapon, I feared nothing.

I breathed in the sunshine and felt the clouds dispelling. It was a year since I had contacted anyone at Crescent Moon School. I had passed by the store regularly to get my fix of the magical blend of incenses and oils. I missed it all terribly. Magic and Witchcraft had become such a life-giving part of my life that its absence gnawed at me horribly. Why didn't I just try again? I could at least sit through the deity part and see where it would lead me. No one forced me to sign my soul over to an obscure cult. What did I have to lose? I was already losing. It was time to face my demons once more. I had defined what my beliefs were. I now had to deal with the apparent contradictions in dogma between the two traditions.

I bowed my head.

"I dedicate myself to a year and a day of studying and searching. Lord, please guide me."

A God of Many Faces

Months passed and the deity section loomed ahead. I was determined to give it a chance. I was also determined to be true to myself and not be swayed by others' reactions. I had a lifetime friendship with Jesus. I would not trade that for any number of magic wands or vials of potions. I would present myself to my Lord and present my Lord to others with no shame.

We started reviewing deity figures one pantheon at a time, from the Middle East, to Greece and Rome, through to Asia, Central America, and the Polynesian islands. Then one day I opened my notes to the day's lecture and the room collapsed around me. Staring back at me was a list of figures from the Judeo-Christian pantheon. I whispered each name, each syllable familiar on my tongue like a rolling mantra, a song of old that had suddenly been reawakened in me. I looked at the names on the page: names of angels, men and women from the Old Testament and New Testament, ancient deities of Babylon still recorded in the Scriptures, names of saints . . .

My whole being wanted to sit in the midst of these people, wanted to celebrate and learn with them. It was a feeling beyond the logic and scrutiny of my studies up to now, the careful calculation as to how much over the line it was safe for me to cross. My lineage. At last.

Monotheism vs. Polytheism

The majority of Witches practice some form of polytheism, often through reverence to ancient-world pantheons. The first and second commandments received by Moses on Mount Sinai state:

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You must have no other god besides me. (Exodus 20:2–3)

An apparent problem poses itself: Is it possible to be a monotheistic Witch? Is it possible to be a polytheistic Christian? Wicca is not regimented by an authoritative body that dictates rules of practice and dogma. Within a Pagan framework, the practice of monotheistic Witchcraft would be a personal choice and would still figure as a minority belief rather than the usual route. But it is a viable choice.

The beauty of polytheism is that it offers the opportunity for a personal dialogue with different deity figures that correspond to our needs and questioning of the moment. A Witch working with an Egyptian pantheon will have multiple deities to invoke for different aspects of daily life: Isis for healing, Bast for creativity, Ra for protection . . .

Monotheism, by contrast, is much less personal and accessible on issues relating to daily life. For example, it would surely feel more appropriate to offer a word of praise to Vesta, Roman goddess of the hearth in matters of keeping peace and unity in a home, than to Almighty Jehovah, who at first glance seems far removed from such matters. This presence of the Divine in the most mundane activities gives great appeal to the Pagan way of life. How wonderful to relate to God in our everyday life! How great to set an altar in our home to ensure our safety or our health and prosperity! Is it possible to keep this aspect of intimacy within a monotheistic framework?

I spent every spare moment reading and researching. The predominant wave of religious and theological thought in academic circles has been strongly dominated by the monotheistic view. But as I read, I found an interesting variation on this theme. *Monotheism by exclusion* is exemplified by the Judeo-Christian religion, and this is what we usually refer to when we

speak of monotheism. Only one name designates the true god: "YHWH is One and his Name is One."

By contrast, *monotheism by inclusion* offers an interesting alternative.[1] In this ideology there are many gods, who for social or cultural reasons have merged into one entity. In this practice, either one name emerges as being the one true name of the deity, or all names become equal. Since our understanding of the Divine is limited by our human nature, it is only to be expected that an infinite number of names and manifestations arise. Our intelligence is limited by our ability to name things. Often, and this is especially true of spiritual matters, words are inadequate to describe the experiences and teachings we receive. They are better described in terms of states, feelings, or symbols—concepts that are poorly translated into the faculty of language.

The many names and shapes of the "manifestations" of the Divine give us a means of experiencing divinity on a daily level. Even the church sees the importance of this most human need to relate to the Divine in a personal way. The patronage of saints is a clear example. Countless Christians pray to Saint Joseph for matters related to work and family, to Saint Jude for desperate causes, and to Saint Anthony of Padua for finding lost things. This form of monotheism includes a many-faceted aspect of the Divine without betraying the worship of the one God that is familiar to Christians.

I am asked often whether I truly believe that Jesus is a god, whether Mary is a goddess. The truth is that I do not know what God is. This question has been the center of debate since the foundation of the Christian church. A number of people, including bishops and priests, were excommunicated from the early church for venturing ideas on the divine nature of Christ and of the Holy Trinity. Anyone who formulated new theories on this topic risked the label of heretic. The great Origen of Alexandria, the early Christian theologian, made a clear distinction between

truth, which he based on Scripture, and opinions, which are speculations on the unknowable. He did not condemn these opinions; he actually proposed a number of them. Opinions are dangerous only when they are proclaimed as truths. We need to continue exploring possibilities, theories, new ways of grappling with the Mysteries. We need working paradigms to connect to the Divine and to acknowledge its presence in our daily life. It is the only way we can fulfill ourselves as human beings.

As far as God is concerned, I believe in an ever-flowing force, ever changing, ever creating. I believe that Jesus is an embodiment of that force. I believe that such a divine force cannot come into the world stranded from itself completely. It must surround itself with the greatest possible expression of godliness it can find. Mary was the greatest expression of the Divine Feminine present in the world. That makes her God-dess to me. The others who have found holiness within themselves and who have transcended their human limitations to express this exalted state, they are godly to me. They are deities. They have walked both worlds, the earthly and the divine. There could be no more perfect expression of God.

My tradition abounded with such figures, all complex and mysterious. These people, gelled by the scribes of history, had grown beyond the confines of their mortal lives. They were magnificent and immortal. They were a mythology in its true sense. I only had to sit with them and take a moment to discover them in a new way.

The Person of Jesus

Everything revolves around Jesus . . .

I was in church one Sunday, pondering the meaning of Christ's visit on Earth, when our priest said something astounding. He said, "Christ is our teaching. He left us no book, no writings, no dictates to regiment our lives.

Christ is our example. He is the model upon which to build our priesthood." As Christians, everything we need to know about God, or the universe or whatever we choose to call it, stems from Jesus Christ. He is our model, our teacher. By sitting with him and reading the accounts of those who knew him, we become fulfilled as human beings.

Jesus came as a man. He was born of a woman and discovered the world as does every other human child. He learned a trade, a very humble one. He participated in worship in his synagogue and at the Temple. He celebrated with his kin at weddings and feasts, rejoiced with them and mourned the passing of friends and family. In short, he was truly human. He felt joy and sadness and anxiety and fear. He did not live in detachment from the world in order to be closer to God. He brought God here with him. And throughout his life, one thing never wavered: he had complete faith in God.

This faith is what allowed him to walk on water, heal the sick, and feed the multitudes. His human condition did not separate him from God; his faith united him with his Father. He had an unwavering hope in his Father even as death was approaching. Jesus said, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could tell this mountain to uproot itself and plant itself somewhere else. And it would do it."[2] It is truly the essence of faith in the Divine—the knowledge that nothing is impossible when one plunges within and turns in complete faith to the Almighty.

Ever since I was a little child, Jesus has been my confidant, my solace, and my counsel. He would come to me in my dreams and answer the most profound of existential questions, and without effort I would understand. I felt his presence around me, so much so that if I left him behind for a while, a great, unexplained despair would take hold of me. I would then rush to a sanctuary and sit in his presence. And my hope was restored. He answers my prayers in the most tangible of ways, and he has never left me in need. He comes to me in dreams and visions still. He is truly there.

I don't believe that I am special in this. Jesus still talks to whoever takes the time to engage him in dialogue. He promised that he would be with us until the end of time. And he is keeping his promise. He truly is here.

Mary: Virgin, Mother, and Crone

When I was a child, Mary was always the sweetness of life. She would come to me in my dreams, hold my little hand, and show me things about the world. Often, they were sad things: misery, war, pain. But I felt safe with her. And I could look at the darkest parts of the world without fear. I could be in the poorest, dirtiest ghettos of human existence and *feel* what it meant to live there. I could stand at the foot of the cross and feel the rage and sorrow and complete surrender. My whole being would vibrate at the frequency of what was around me. Such was the gift of her presence.

Mary is a crucial pillar in my practice. She is the essence of the Sacred Feminine—the Virgin, Mother, and Crone. She deserves to be discussed in depth, because she is the embodiment of the Divine Feminine. We will return to her shortly to give her the attention she is due.

The Blessed Ones: Those Who Served and Loved Him

Since the dawn of time, our world has been graced with the presence of God. The raw presence . . .

Some men and women truly have lived in this presence. Why some and not others, I do not know. Attunement, maybe? Maybe special circumstances? Nevertheless, these blessed ones have received special gifts from God. By getting to know their stories and their teachings, we find the light and breath to make us grow. I have often screamed out in frustration, "Who will lead us? Who will teach us?" I have come to realize that the ones

who passed before us are our true guides. These blessed ones have received gifts of wisdom, and their legacy truly is a divine one.

The Apostles: Each apostle has a story and special character. Jesus did not dismiss them for their flaws or outbursts. He accepted them completely and blessed them with his presence and teaching regardless of their shortcomings. Many of them have also written their accounts of Jesus' teachings. Only two of them, Matthew's and John's, have made it to the canon. The Nag Hammadi library,[3] unearthed some sixty-five years ago, has given us seekers a gift of wisdom beyond what could ever have been hoped for. It features many Gnostic texts and is a must for anyone interested in Christianity beyond the regimented practice of the church. This collection features Gospels from Thomas, Philip, and Mary Magdalene, although the last has been severely damaged. These new accounts show us new facets of the teachings of our Lord. Each encounter with Jesus was unique, and this is reflected in these writings. This richness of experience is a divine gift. Many names, not all of them apostles, are mentioned in the Scriptures, and they each carry a special experience:

John the Baptist
The Disciples
Joseph of Arimathea
Nicodemus
The Centurion
Lazarus
The Disciples of Emmaus
The Women
The Myrrh Bearers

The Weeping Women
Veronica
Mary and Martha

The saints: The stories of the lives of the saints offer tangible lessons, teaching through action. They are true companions for the road, not only because the church has deemed them worthy but also because their stories resonate with the presence of God here among us. These stories are also full of symbols that reach us on a very sub-logical level. Many saints have also committed their thoughts and mystical experiences to writing, especially the monks and sisters of the monastic era.

We also have modern-day saints in our midst today. Their whole being beams with divine light, and just standing in their close vicinity can open our thirst for more closeness with God.

The matriarchs and the patriarchs: The Old Testament is filled with men and women who have shaped the history of our people. We Christians are, after all, an offshoot of Judaism. We retained our Jewish roots and customs for most of the first two centuries of the common era. The figures of the Old Testament are part of our lineage and our mythology, and much esoteric and symbolic knowledge can be gained from them. There are the obvious figures who are most widely known: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, David and Goliath, Abraham and Sarah, and all their descendants. There are also some occult figures that are of interest to those who study the Mysteries: Lilith, Adam's first wife, who is only fleetingly mentioned; the Pagan wives of Jacob; the Queen of Sheba; and the warrior women of the Torah. These women emerge with such force in a male-dominated era that they become a true inspiration to all those

seeking strength and wisdom. They are our true mythology, our connection to a time of old.

Angels and spirit folk: Angels are an indisputable part of our collective experience. Numerous cultures report tales of winged creatures sent by God. Humans who have had insight into these entities report a full hierarchy, with classes of angels, rankings, and special assignments. A number of names have been heard on the wind; the most important of these are the archangels, who have been the intermediaries between God and humans since the dawn of time: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel. Michael is the Warrior, associated with fire, whose mighty sword cast Lucifer from heaven into the depths of hell. Gabriel is associated with air. He is the messenger, the one who announced to Mary the special role she would play. He is also said to have dictated the Koran to Mohammed. Raphael, angel of earth, is the Healer. His name literally means "God heals," and many biblical scholars believe he is the healing "angel of the Lord" mentioned in the Gospel of John. Uriel is the angel of water, love, and compassion.

Every morning in elementary school, we would say a prayer to our guardian angel. It is probably through this angel that we can best be acquainted with the angelic realm. No other entity has a more personal connection with each of us. Kabbalah, the mystical teaching of Judaism, professes that all living entities must have this angelic presence so that the breath of God can sustain them.[4] Our guardian angel is our life force, our counsel, and our connection to the unseen world. Angels sometimes come in visions or dreams, and with time and practice one can learn to recognize them. I had a dream once, so vivid that I knew I had left the world for a little while. There I met my angel and she talked to me. Now, every time I see someone who

looks like her—who has the same complexion, the same radiance, the same crystal music, and the same smell of sunshine—I know that I am in the presence of an angel. And I open my mind and heart to receive the angel's gifts.

It is by choice that I have not gone into detail on the people listed in this section. So much is written on these characters, and some of them have written such an imposing amount of works, that this titanic task is impossible. Nevertheless, we are seekers. I merely wanted to open the door to a new world, a new perspective on the world we thought we knew. Embrace them and get to know them. They will reveal themselves to you in the most blessed of ways.

God as a Woman

It was not until I reached adolescence that I realized how difficult it was, as a woman, to find a sacred expression of myself. The repercussions of this are tangible in every aspect of society. Our sexuality is repressed, childbearing considered a burden by the workforce. It is more difficult to find equitable work conditions, and often we are left with more work and less pay. As a Catholic I was also submitted to the preaching of men who knew nothing of what it was to be a young woman, a wife, or a mother. From a sociological point of view, I knew all this. I had read some feminist texts in college, and although I found the ideas a little exaggerated and the approach aggressive, I understood the need for the feminist voice. Yet it was not until the door to the Sacred Feminine was reopened to me that I realized how much we are thirsting for a different way of experiencing the world: a feeling, a vibration deep in our being.

This exalted state of being that makes us vibrate in symphony with something other than ourselves, which makes us cry or laugh for no *reason*, this is the Goddess. This is the state of receptivity that brings us into a state

of correspondence with the world. It is that state that lets us contemplate devastation and be truly moved from deep within our core. This is the seat of compassion. This is the seat of uncontrollable fury that can destroy all in its passage. It is where the desire for life resides, life in spite of everything. And always the unshakable faith and hope that we may see ourselves in the eyes of our neighbors and truly see the grandness of our condition.

Until then, the Goddess wasn't much more than a mythological figure, like so many Greek or Roman statuettes. Then one day I picked up the groundbreaking work of Merlin Stone.[5] I understood then the true reverberation of the Sacred Feminine. As I flipped through the pages of Merlin Stone's book, I felt myself connected to a time of old when women were held sacred due to their status as life-giver and life-sustainer. In these goddess-worshipping societies, women could own businesses and land, participate in the political organization of their communities, choose their spouse, and lead people in worship.

I realized how much I had been thirsting for the recognition of my divine purpose: that of giving and sustaining life. That golden calf, symbol of the life-giving goddess, had been destroyed to give way to the worship of manliness, war, hostility, and aggression. The corporate world still thrives on these principles in a futile chase to build empires made of paper. What is that compared to the power to give life, a power that both men and women share? Thousands of years later, women are still trying to regain the position that was ripped away from us when male deities overthrew Goddess worship. We all suffer the consequences. It is time to bring her home.

The Femininity of God

Was the Goddess still here among us? Could I still find her? How to make place for a Mother Goddess when the Father stands so large in the foreground? For me, visually, God was a man. But I knew that to be absurd.

God had no body in the biological sense. He could not be male. I found that most theologians agreed with me: in God there is, *in the sense of sexuality*, no gender. Only certain factions of extremist Christians will argue to the contrary. As with most issues so far in my search, we were facing a problem of semantics. Most languages do not have a suitable pronoun that is genderless and that could be suitable for a personal encounter with God. Most pronouns that negate gender, such as *it*, are impersonal and denote a notion of inferiority. This forces us to use a gender-specific pronoun when speaking of God, who has traditionally been referred to as male. As I opened my eyes and ears, I became aware of subtle changes. I heard "Our Father" become "Our Parent." Somehow, that did not resonate with me. I could not conceive of a genderless God. Regardless of where this trend will take our worship, our initial problem seems solved: God is not male.

It was the Goddess I was looking for, the essence of fertility and abundance, the rage and fury, life and death . . .

Was there room for her in my Christian practice? It has always seemed clear to me that for a child to grow physically and morally, she or he needs a father figure and a mother figure. A logical correlate to this statement is that to grow spiritually, humans also need a mother and a father deity figure. Different denominations of Christianity have dealt with this issue in various ways. In the Catholic faith, the devotion to Mary is very much alive. The imposing cathedrals and shrines in her honor, the ritual prayers of devotion, and the pilgrimages to the locations of her many sightings make Mary a goddess in everything but name. In practice, she is treated as a goddess. Her assumption into heaven, body and soul, demonstrates her status above the human condition.

Mary as a Goddess

Mary has always been at the center of a debate. Cast away by some and adulated by others, there is no doubt that she fascinates and compels us more than we can explain. She is the Triple Goddess par excellence: the Maiden, Mother, and Crone all wrapped up in one splendid figure. But aside from her beatific, virginal depiction, she is as deep and complex as any woman. And she has grown with us for over two thousand years.

The lore that surrounds Mary reaches back to before her own birth. Joachim and Anne, being advanced in age, had given up hope of having children. When Anne unexpectedly became pregnant, she dedicated her unborn child to the service of God. And so it was that Mary was presented to the temple as a child, dedicated from the start to serve God. She received the great honor of weaving the temple veil, an honor reserved for very few. When she became of age, it is said that the temple priests searched for a worthy widower to take her in and make her his wife. Joseph was selected by the temple priests, and they were promised to each other.

The rest of the story is contained in the Gospels. While still unmarried, Mary received the visit of the angel Gabriel, who announced that she was to bear the child of God through the intercession of the Holy Spirit. And so it was. She gave birth to a son, Jesus, who would change our world forever.

Throughout the Gospels, we see Mary as a woman of humility and complete devotion. She sees all and "keeps these things in her heart."[6] She is the only one who truly understands the scope of her son's mission on Earth. She understands his power, she understands his sacrifice, and always she is silently present. She is the absolute mother. She has the humility and faith to put her sadness and heart-rending pain aside for the sake of the work her son has to do. Yet she does not turn away. She does not crumble under the pain of seeing her son persecuted and killed. She stands at his every step. She is always there.

Mary has permeated our cultural consciousness throughout the years, and her image is ever changing. In the Eastern Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, the *Theotokos*, or bearer of God, is central to devotion. [7] The icons of the Virgin are holy relics and have been repeatedly graced with miraculous events. In Poland, the cult of the Black Madonna is a centerpiece of nationalistic and religious practice. Many depictions have been rendered of the Madonna with a dark complexion. Some archaeologists claim that this is due to the conversion of Old World goddess figures, such as Isis for example, into Christian icons. A goddess transformed, if you will, in order to remain with her people . . .

In our current age, Mary has been present in the most fantastic of ways. Many sightings of her have been reported, the most publicized of these at Lourdes and at Fatima. Believing in the authenticity of these apparitions is not mandatory to dogma, meaning that belief in their authenticity is not considered a pillar of the Catholic faith. Regardless, it has given us the opportunity to reunite with Mary in a new way. Whereas Mary had been depicted as a virginal and innocent child-woman throughout the Renaissance, all of a sudden we meet a Mary who is radically different. She is the bleeding heart who exhorts us to repentance and warns us of ill fates. She comes to us in urgency, in love, but also in accusation for our straying. She pleads for our return to prayer and devotion. She is a guide who stands by us and leads us, though prayer, back to her son.

Mary is the embodiment of our closest aspiration to a divine relationship. Not only did she stand in the divine presence all her life, she has also remained a full-fledged woman. She is the divine intercessor who carries our pledges directly to the heart of God. She is the teacher who teaches us to stay in the light despite the overcoming darkness. She is the protectress who intercedes for our human nature in front of the divine altar. She is the one who has witnessed evil and suffering and who has not

flinched. She is hope and faith, no matter the darkness of the hour. She understands our journeys in despair when the world stops making sense. And she does not flinch. She is a warrior woman in all her gentleness and compassion. A true woman.

The Other Mary

The beauty of this path is that we are not bound by dogma. We can listen to any legend, rumor, and conspiracy theory and decide in our hearts whether we can subscribe to this story or not. No woman in the history of the world has triggered our collective imagination more than Mary Magdalene. Even now, two thousand years later, she causes turmoil in our psyche, in our religious institutions, and in our faith. She haunts us, she teases us; we simply cannot get rid of her image. And thank heavens for that! Her recurrent presence and the inflamed discussions around her life and message are a living testimony of her importance in our lives and in our relationship to God.

As with Jesus' mother, the Gospel is quite succinct on details of this central character. But fables about her abound, forming a true Christian mythology that the church has had a hard time suppressing.

So, what do we know for sure? We know that she was a disciple of Jesus and that she had a special place among the disciples. We know that she followed Jesus to the foot of the cross and was with him until the very end. We also know that she was the first one to witness the resurrection. She witnessed the empty tomb and spoke to Jesus in his resurrected state. She was mandated by him to announce the news to the apostles, awarding her the title "Apostle of the Apostles."

That's all we know.

Much confusion exists with regard to Mary's actual identity. Pope Gregory I, in his infamous speech in the year 591, forever merged the

identity of Mary of Magdala with that of the adulteress. Maybe in an attempt to suppress devotion to her, her image was depicted as a lascivious woman, a prostitute, penitent for her wayward ways. There is no actual evidence in the Gospels that this was the case. Some theories say that Mary must have been a woman of means, a woman of the world, which could explain the image of conversion from a worldly life to a more spiritual life. She may have been a financial supporter of Jesus and his apostles, giving them lodging and sustenance. Other theories suggest that Mary Magdalene and Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus, are also one and the same. So much speculation exists on the actual identity of this important woman. Undoubtedly, she was a fervent follower of Christ and had a special relationship with him. And now, let the fun begin . . .

Legends abound on Mary Magdalene. One school of thought is that she was in fact married to Jesus, that she was his wife as well as his disciple.[8] This is supported by accounts in the Gnostic Gospels that he often kissed her on the mouth, which could mean the actual act of kissing or, in the Gnostic tradition, a passage of wisdom. The Gospel of Mary Magdalene,[9] while being severely damaged, shows that Jesus did teach her things that were very different from the other apostles. It also shows a very clear rivalry between Peter and her due to her special status. Other authors support the marriage theory because, according to Jewish law, a man could not become a teacher until he was married. It would have been unlikely that the Temple elders would have let Jesus preach in the Temple had he not been married. However, the actual marriage is not mentioned in any Gospel or text that we know of.

The great legend of Mary Magdalene and Jesus does not stop there, however. It is told that Mary Magdalene was forced to flee the Holy Land. She landed on the shores of France in a boat without oars, and she established herself there. She was accompanied by a young girl of thirteen

named Sarah. It is believed that Sarah was the daughter of Mary Magdalene and Jesus, the Holy Grail incarnate. The bloodline of Jesus. This bloodline was eventually merged into the line of the Merovingian kings of France, who were famed for their red hair and their uncanny abilities. A secret order was formed to protect this bloodline and to preserve knowledge from unscrupulous factions. Add into this intrigue the Priory of Sion, the Knights Templar, the Crusades, lines of kings, Joan of Arc, the Holy Inquisition, the Order of Saint-Sulpice, Leonardo da Vinci, and Isaac Newton, and you get the biggest conspiracy theory ever told. It's enough to make anyone's head spin.

Mary Magdalene is central to my devotion. Whatever I choose to believe about her relationship to Jesus, it is clear to me that she held a special place. All the efforts to bury her and distort her story only reinforce the fact that she has a lot to teach us. As an apostle, she has no match. She is strong and devoted. As with Jesus' mother, she does not flinch in front of pain and suffering. She walks the path to the very end. She is also fully female. If anything, the merging with the adulteress only reinforces the sexual dimension of her being, a dimension that has been completely washed out of the Scriptures. The depiction of her having long, flowing red hair brings us back to a place where one can be holy and powerful at the same time. She is not the meek, obedient servant. She stands tall without excusing herself. She also displays unwavering faith, the kind of faith that could raise the dead.

The Gospel of Mary Magdalene lets us see that Jesus taught Mary very different things from the other apostles. These teachings seem more mystical in nature. Unfortunately, the section in which Mary actually relates these teachings has been destroyed, and we may never know what Jesus told her in private. Yet we can learn a lot just by looking at all this information, the official writings and the legends combined.

If one does believe that Mary Magdalene is indeed the sister of Martha and Lazarus, then I recommend an old document, published by Cistercian Publications, which is an absolute gem.[10] It tells of the story of Mary and her sister Martha, who establish themselves in France (coincidence?). Whereas Martha busies herself with healing the sick and feeding the hungry, Mary retires to a mountain cave. There she lives in ecstatic contemplation, feeding herself from the hands of angels and sitting in daily communion with our Lord.

We see here the two paths of godly work: the practical and the mystical. Jesus told Peter that he was the rock on which Jesus would build his church. Whereas Peter was entrusted with building a worldly church to perpetuate the teachings of Jesus, Mary's gift was one of the spirit and of revelation. The old rivalry found in Mary Magdalene's gospel is still alive, and both aspects are necessary in our world. Mary's gift to us is the gift of spirit, the gift of sitting in communion and gaining a true relationship with the Divine. She guides in silence, in secrecy and humility. We can look to her and learn to be strong and virile and elevated.

Another Way to See the Femininity of God

Sometimes the femininity of God comes in more subtle expressions. If we believe that Jesus is the embodiment of God, it is then by observing Jesus' actions and listening to his teachings that we gain a better understanding of the essence of God. Jesus used many stories and metaphors to convey his message. He often used metaphors for God that portrayed God in a woman's role, such as a housekeeper, which would have been unheard of in a Judaic vision of a kingly deity. As author Sandra M. Schneiders puts it: "Jesus delegitimized the stereotypically male 'virtues' and the typically masculine approach to reality; he validated the stereotypically female virtues and lived a distinctly 'feminine' lifestyle."[11]

Jesus espoused this lifestyle by taking care of the sick and the poor, by speaking of peace and tolerance, and by assuming the servant role on more than one occasion. He also showed respect for women by acting toward them differently than Jewish custom expected. In Jesus, Christians are presented with a deity image that incorporates both the feminine and the masculine. He symbolically sustains our life with his body, the same way women bring forth life into the world. The feminine aspect of God is always there, either in the devotion to the actual mother of Christ or in the recognition of the feminine virtues of Jesus. A Christian practice need not therefore make abstraction of the Goddess. In an all-encompassing deity, there is a place for both God and Goddess.

And Then, There Were Two

One night a dream came. I saw a man with a crown of thorns. A little bird flew by his head and came to rest close to him. This vision faded into another. Men dressed in suits came into my home looking for me. They told me that I was to come with them, that they had been looking for me. I was brought to a land removed from the world. I had been removed from the world because of my power to destroy evil, a power that men feared greatly. I was dressed in long, gray robes, a veil on my head. I was riding a donkey on a dusty road surrounded by other people dressed like me. Sand-colored hills rolled all around us, an occasional hamlet visible in the distance. The wind blew a dry, sand-filled heat on our faces. All was quiet, save for the wind.

On the side of the road, I saw a woman dressed like myself tending to a man under a fig tree. His arms and ribs were caked with blood. The woman was patiently bandaging his wound with fresh white linen. I saw that the man had two large wounds on his forearms. The woman looked up at me, a questioning look in her eyes. I could hear her thinking, *Will she recognize us*? I got off my donkey and walked toward them. As recognition dawned in

my mind, blood started to trickle from the man's wounds. The woman started to tend to his wounds once more. I came closer and pushed the man's cloak aside. On it was a picture of a robin. I exclaimed, "You're the man with the robin!"

I woke up to a new world. I had found a part of myself. I felt as though I had been there and met my deities face to face. I had felt the sandy desert wind and smelled the sweat of a thousand pilgrims. I had been there, in their presence. They were there, on my path, under a fig tree. I recognized them. My search had ended.

That night I was there, in the presence of my Lord. I could feel the heat and the dust on my face. I could hear their thoughts and feel their power: a couple, in perfect balance, one taking care of the weakness of the other.

Looking for a deity couple was a new concept for me. Doesn't the first commandment say that there is only one God? Isn't that what separated us initially from the ancient Semitic religions? If God encompassed everything, all possibilities and all energy, wasn't the reverence of a couple of deity figures redundant?

I started practicing with this concept long before I really understood its implications in magic and in daily life. The main concept at work here is *polarity*. As humans, we constantly think in terms of polarities: big/small, light/dark, good/evil . . . This learning comes very early on and is in fact a milestone in our development as children. We usually classify people, events, or things along a spectrum between two opposing forces. It is simply natural for us to do so. It is very difficult for us to think in terms of absolutes, or to integrate all the information available to us for a given situation, without relying on the easy classification system available to us through opposing spectrums.

God cannot be classified this way. God is an all-encompassing entity, a state of energy. In other words, God is a concept we cannot grasp with our

human range of understanding.

The ultimate human form of polarity is the male/female polarity. All our spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental faculties come to fruition in the sexual union of the male and female counterparts. Whether this is in the actual physical union or through a symbolic encounter of male virility and female receptivity, there is no denying that the union of the male/female polarity is the closest we can come to a balance or a feeling of oneness. So much energy and yearning is unleashed through this union! It has been thus since the beginning of time. It is necessary for the survival of the species and the passing on of winning genetic combinations. But in humans, mating is more than that. We are not overpowered by an instinctual need to reproduce. We are looking for that completion, a sacred unity that takes place when we find our complementary half. Then we are whole again. At last.

This need is so strong and its power so great in our psyche, that it has pervaded ancient religions for thousands of years. Each god had his goddess consort: Isis and Osiris, Zeus and Hera, Asherah and El . . . As a Christian, I grew up with a fatherly image of God. The more I learned about world deities, the more having a single image could not satisfy me anymore. A fatherly image is a beautiful thing, but it lacks so many other dimensions that are equally important. We have all experienced the difference between fatherly love and motherly love. There are some things we simply wouldn't go to our father for, and other things we wouldn't go to our mother for. The differences are not in the intensity of love. They are qualitatively different.

As a Christian Pagan, I was faced with two choices: adopting an all-encompassing deity or adopting a deity couple, a representation of the polarity that is the source of life on Earth. Under that fig tree, I saw my whole God. I saw loving service, humility, strength of character, even defiance. I have chosen Witchcraft because I am a human being here to

fulfill my human aspirations: to love, to search, to be amazed, to hurt and heal, to overcome, to hope and to have faith. Too long I witnessed my church destroy every beauty my humanity had to offer. I am human. That is why I can experience this beautiful world. I've decided to experience God in a human way. That is the way I will get the best understanding possible under my human circumstances.

A Long-Awaited Blessing

We all stood in circle. Joyce gave thanks to the deities and elements present. She smiled and looked at each of us proudly. Eight of us were finishing our first level, and we had come to be sisters in many ways. Joyce called me to the center of the circle. I walked up to her, my heart pounding in my chest. Our eyes locked. She said, "Adelina, have you chosen your deity pair?" I answered, "I have." She continued, "Who have you chosen?" I took a deep breath, bathed in the energy of this holy gathering and I stated for all to hear, "Jesus of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala."

Joyce smiled and nodded her head. She dipped her finger in an oily blend and brought it to my forehead; making the sign of the cross, she said, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth and of Mary Magdalene, I bless you and congratulate you on completing your first level."

I went back to my place in circle with tears in my eyes. A woman had just blessed me with a holy cross, in the name of my Lord and Lady, in the midst of a most holy gathering of exceptional women. My whole body was shivering from the unexpectedness of this gift. To be in holy space, in a gathering of women, in the presence of my God and Goddess, living our magic and offering it as our legitimate gift to the world . . . I had come home.

A Year and a Day Later

It had been a year and a day since I had visited my sacred grove of trees. I had come with a simple pledge: to walk the Pagan path once more for a year and a day to see where it would lead me. I had asked for guidance and protection as I set out on unchartered waters.

Here I was, a year and a day later. So much had happened over the course of that year. I had met extraordinary people, women I knew would walk with me and teach me for a long time. A bond of sisterhood had been solidly forged through our experiences and the sharing of our successes and fears. We had all grown immensely. I stood here, a different person. Where doubt and fear had been, I sensed a grounded strength.

I had been aimlessly wandering in the desert, looking, hoping for the Promised Land. I had lived in conflict, wishing for a resolution, hoping that my vision of magic and devotion to my lineage was not an impossible dream. My quest was to find a central pillar to my faith. This center, I had found it where it had always been: in my friendship and devotion to Jesus, to his teachings and example. And I had found female force and beauty in a new devotion to Mary Magdalene. This was something I could build on. As long as I had this to rely on, I could wander in the desert and test the slopes of the highest mountains, and I would always have a central pillar of faith in the teachings of my Lord and Lady. I felt overwhelmed by emotion and peace on this sunny afternoon. I stood in the midst of nature with nothing in my hands to offer but the most soul-felt gratitude. I looked around me and whispered for whoever could hear me:

"Here I am, faithful to the calling, for my path has told me that I truly am
the daughter of the birthing waters and keeper of the stone slate.
The path of the seeker has led me to your wonders, without and within, and
I offer my thanks today.
I have seen the face of my God and Goddess and am rededicated to their
course.

Jesus Christ and his consort Mary Magdalene have lifted the questioning from my brow through their love, as it was in the beginning and now shall be.

The path of the seeker has led me to a coven of people who love and accept and judge not. A place where my beliefs are respected and where counsel and support abound.

The path has led me to my sisters, whose love and power feed in me the recognition of my own name.

The path has opened my thirst for the earth and its glories, opening a physical need for the freshness and rejuvenation through the elements.

And within the glories abound, most of all in the recognition that I am Hope. Hope and knowledge of evil are the weapons given to me to love and cure.

"For the strength to be strong through the power of unwavering faith,

For the belief in beauty,

For the power and need and pain to create and bring things forth into the world,

For the eyes of the Witch who sees in all things the lessons of life,

For the recognition of the barriers that still stand and the respect for their presence,

For the acknowledgement of the Dark Moon within and the expression of its presence,

For the knowledge that balance is within me and around me as an active process that I influence every day,

For the balance within now that I have found you, Lord and Lady, and the conviction in myself to walk my own path,

For all these things,

I thank you."

[1]. For more on monotheism by inclusion, see R. J. Z. Werblowsky, "What's in a Name: Reflections on God, Gods, and the Divine," in the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1985). This essay is also online, at http://www.jstor.org/pss/30233339.
[2]. Matthew 17:20.
[3]. See James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996).
[4]. David A. Cooper, *God Is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997).
[5]. Merlin Stone, *When God Was A Woman* (Orlando, FL: Harvest Books, 1976).
[6]. Luke 2:51. Also see E. Ann Matter, "The Virgin Mary: A Goddess?" in Carl Olson, ed., *The Book of the Goddess, Past and Present* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).
[7]. See, for example, Kyriacos C. Markides, *Gifts of the Desert: The Forgotten Path of Christian Spirituality* (New York: Doubleday, 2005).
[8] . Michael Baigent, et al. *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (New York: Delacorte, 2005).
[9]. Robinson, ed. *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*.
[10]. David Mycoff, trans. *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of Her Sister Saint Martha*. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1989).
[11]. Sandra M. Schneiders, *Women and the Word: The Gender of God in the New Testament*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986).

Chapter 4

Living in the World: To Worship, to Seek, to Love

To Worship

To raise my own cup: ritual and celebration

Part of our third-year training was to lead a public ritual. Until then we had participated in many rituals—we even had some active part in their design—but these had always been small and among friends and fellow students. Now, we were faced with the task of designing a ritual for the great feast of Yule, the winter solstice, and it was to be open to anyone who wished to attend.

We had been placed in a group of four students. No association was as fortunate as ours. I found myself with a group of women who believed in the same precepts that I did. One of them actually had Christian affinities, but this group went beyond that. We all believed in simplicity and in unity. None of us needed the ritual drama and the extensive tools to build up a ritual. We believed in our own energy, and that was all we needed to celebrate. Different though we may be, we were united in purpose and in dedication.

Yule is celebrated around December 21st, time of the winter solstice, the longest night of the year. It is traditional to encourage the sun to come up by lighting candles throughout the night. We decided to focus our ritual on the celebration of light. We did not focus on the various mythologies, the position of the planets that night, or on specific quarter calls. We did not focus on things that would divide us. Yule is a time of light in the darkness. We could all relate to that. The light. This would be a ritual of fire and of hope.

We arrived early to our ritual space above the store. We swept and decorated the feast table. We gathered around our altar and sent out our most heartfelt energy. This was to be a sacred space, and we were about to become Priestesses of our ritual. We were both excited and deeply moved by the beauty of what was about to take place. I sent a wave of earth, air, fire, and water around the room in final purification. Then, all four of us retreated to the side room to balance our energy and focus our purpose. We could hear people starting to gather in the ritual room. Their energy was already filling the room.

We walked in, holding hands. We wore long skirts and our hips were draped with ornate scarves. With each step, we left a trail of bells behind us, a trail of vibrant sound and energy. We took our place in the middle of the circle. We were submerged in complete darkness. A soft music was playing. I stated our purpose for this night: "Yule is a time for joy and hope, for that is the light that carries us in our darkest moments."

Our voices rose up as one: "As the sun guides us through our days, so our hope guides us in our darkness. Our hope shines in the dark and spreads unto the world. May there be light."

As our energy flowed into our central pillar on the altar, our sister struck the match that dispelled all darkness. We turned around to see the face of those gathered around us. We made our way to the outside of the circle,

turning clockwise, and we summoned the forces of fire with all our might. Each step we took set the floor on fire, heating us with the heat of passion and the courage to overcome all obstacles. The circle was cast. Each one of us then proceeded to call our quarters, the elements, who would protect the gates and supply us with the spirit of stability, inspiration, courage, and compassion. Sara picked up the pillar candle and wished peace and light to everyone. The fire was then passed around the circle as each participant lit her candle. We continued our invocations:

Holy one of many faces,
Father, lover, magician, warrior, teacher
Light of our days
Join us in our longest night
And fulfill our hopes

Holy Lady of many names,
Mother, lover, seer
Light of our nights
Be with us in our darkness
And bring us peace.

Candace continued, "It is customary at this time of the year to exchange gifts with our loved ones." She held up a cast-iron cauldron. "This is the cauldron of the Goddess, from which all good things flow. May the Lord and Lady's light shine on us all."

Each participant then walked up to the altar to deposit a slip of paper with a wish written on it. Once everyone had finished, the cauldron was passed around and each person picked a wish at random. We all took a few moments to reflect on what this particular wish meant for us. I gave a

sideways glance to Sara, showing her the paper I had gotten. It was her wish. She smiled and showed me hers. It was mine.Strange magic, indeed.

Filled with fire and light, we looked at each other. We were full to bursting. The room was on fire and our skin was aflame. With great exhilaration we lifted our arms to the sky. This rite was done.

Our intention was to have a very simple ritual but one filled with energy. The feedback we got from our co-celebrants was fantastic. There was no doubt that the energy was palpable, the wall of fire strong, and the space felt secure. We were prepared emotionally and magically. We were the most important instrument of this ritual. We understood each other and we became one presiding force. The importance of this preparation is what I learned that day.

To worship is to give thanks and reconnect to something greater than ourselves. This greatness is not only above us. It is around us and within us. Kabbalists and Gnostics speak of a divine spark within each of us. The sole desire of this spark is to be reunited with its source. Acts of worship raise those sparks so that they can, for a moment, remember what it was like to be one with the Divine.

As a Witch and a Christian, I focus my worship on that which unites us all. I celebrate the cycles of nature and the Christian holidays. I celebrate these within my church community, within Pagan circles, or as a solitary. Until we can unite around a single altar, I remain a gypsy, finding remembrance wherever I can. I still attend church services and partake in the sacraments.

When we unite to say the Our Father, there is truly a sense of communion with generations of people who put their faith in Christ. No matter the divides between church politics and faith, services are a way to sit

together and remember the teachings that we received from Jesus. I have been blessed with priests who are truly open minded, true examples of devotion to the core of Christ's message. I would never attend services in a church where the priest shows bigotry, hatred, or discrimination toward any group of people. I have stopped going to church at times for that very reason. During such times, I would make special pilgrimages to sanctuaries where I could sit in peaceful contemplation and reconnect with my source.

I know full well that I could be excommunicated in a second if it was known that I call myself a Witch. I know, in my core, that nothing I do betrays the essence of what Jesus taught us. If a priest would take the time to really listen to what I have to say, to my vision of Christ's message and my way of celebrating it, I know that he would find little to say against it. But the inquisitors are still among us, and there is little a woman can do against them. As was the case with all the others who have faced persecution at their hands, the Lord is my judge. I pray that the way I live my life pleases him. Little else matters.

The Yule ritual showed me that it is easy to bring people together if you focus on the elements that unite instead of trying to dodge the elements that divide. As a Christian, so much separated me from these people. But as a human wanting to reconnect with the world and with the divine light, we were indeed all sisters. Our wordings and symbols might be different sometimes, but underlying it all we have the same aspirations. That is what conjures walls of fire and whirlwinds of energy. It is a coming together. When celebrating with others, we only need to focus on what unites us: love, hope, the need for safety and protection, health, overcoming obstacles, finding one's way, the sense of belonging . . . We all vibrate to these frequencies.

Christian and Pagan celebrations

Through Witchcraft, the true calling of my soul, which is to become clergy, is finally a reality. I can surround myself with my family and my community and celebrate life at its deepest meaning. I lead and co-celebrate rituals of my making that both represent and transcend this world.

There are a million reasons to celebrate. We are, after all, social beings, and we are drawn to one another for support and meaning. It is part of what we are. Most of these celebrations are conducted by our religious leaders. But the true celebration is within each and every one of us. We celebrate birth, changes in our bodies and in our social roles, death, unions, achievements . . . We still remember deep in our collective unconscious a time when we celebrated the bounty of nature, the rhythm of the seasons, and the sanctity of the land.

It was not until I was involved in Witchcraft that I realized how much we had abdicated our right to lead our own celebrations. We surrendered it to our religious leaders, as if we had no right or competence to decide how to celebrate our Holy Days. But rituals are built with our hands and hearts. We have forgotten the age-old art of building rituals and calling to the powers that surround us.

There was a time when we used to build rituals to celebrate every aspect of our lives. We are priests and priestesses. Our spirituality isn't the property and responsibility of the clergy. I am the only one responsible for the matters of my soul and those of my family. Christian Witchcraft is a practice of daily manifestations. We can take our spirituality back into our homes and shape it to celebrate the greatest and the simplest of our realities.

At first glance, it seems difficult to bridge Christian and Pagan celebrations. After all, Christian celebrations are centered on events in Christ's life, which are completely excluded from Pagan festivities. Likewise, Pagan celebrations are linked to mythologies from various pantheons, often Greek, Egyptian, or Celtic. Luckily, most Pagan celebrations are closely

linked to Christian holidays, both in date and history. This is a legacy of the Church's crusade to Christianize the world. In an effort to convert the common folk, Pagan celebrations were given a Christian twist so that people would continue to celebrate and be inadvertently brought into a Christian framework.

The Druids portray a great example of the merging of the Pagan/magical system and the Christian one. Most of the early Celtic saints belonged to the privileged class of leaders, jurists, clergy, and scholars, part of the Druid caste. Being people of influence in their societies, these Druids preserved some of their magical traditions while living under Christian rule. The new religion (which was Christianity at the time) incorporated the celebrations and the holy sites by giving them Christian names. Saint Brigit of Kildare was raised as a Druid before she converted to Christianity. She founded her order on the site of a sacred oak and based it on oak symbology. She carried on many of the traditional Druid roles—such as healer, teacher, and clergy—while devoted to the Christian faith. In the Druid, we have the perfect example of the marriage of Paganism and Christianity.

I have also witnessed the incorporation of Christian elements in traditional Cree rites of passage. The walking-out ceremony symbolizes the first steps of a child on the earth outside the tipi. The parents and grandparents take the child out at sunrise and make him or her walk around the tipi for the first time. At these ceremonies, I have heard the grandparents lead people in prayer, saying the Our Father and singing hymns. This is just another example to show that it is easy to include both earth-centered and Christian elements in rituals.

The Wheel of the Year

I visualize my practice on a spectrum with Paganism on one end and Christianity on the other. The rituals I build can be situated at any point on

this spectrum, going from reading Scripture and centering on actual Judeo-Christian events to celebrating the greatness of God through the manifestation of nature. Most of the time, I situate myself in the middle and focus on the elements I find most important at that moment. As my family grows, we are also fashioning rituals that have significance to all of us, building in this way our own clan tradition.

There are eight Pagan Sabbats (or celebrations) completing the Wheel of the Year.

Yule—celebrated December 21st (the winter solstice). On this longest night of the year, Pagans celebrate the feast of light, encouraging the rising of the sun with fire and candles. This symbolism is closely linked to the birth of Christ, light of the world, celebrated on December 25th. On Yule, I light candles to symbolize light in times of darkness. This is my celebration of hope, one of the powers that fuels me in my daily life. As the star shone in Bethlehem, so does my candle dispel the darkness in my own life and lift my spirit to the hope of better days. Yule is a time of quiet joy, for though we are at the peak of darkness, our inner light keeps us strong. This light carries to Christmas a few days later, which is largely a family affair. We attend Mass, where children reenact the birth of Christ. Then, we eat to bursting and revel in the excitement of the children opening their gifts.

Imbolc—celebrated February 2nd, commemorating the Goddess sleeping under the snow and the efforts of her God to wake her softly with gifts and flowers. We can still see this wooing at St. Valentine's Day, day of lovers. But there is also another, very significant Christian celebration on this day. It is the feast of Candlemas. It is the feast of Mary's presentation to the temple, where she was to serve and weave the temple veil. It is also forty days after Christmas, which coincides with the time when Mary, according to Jewish

practice, would have been ritually pure following Jesus' birth. So, this day is essentially dedicated to Mary in her Virgin and Mother aspects. It was celebrated by lighting candles, hence the name of Candlemas. It also coincides with the feast of St. Brigid, who was dedicated to the healing of women, midwifery, and child care. This feast commemorates the promise of spring, of life, and of women's power as guardians of this life. It is a great time for a women's circle, where we can acknowledge the Goddess in each of us. We can look at each other and truly say, "You are Goddess." I also take a moment to recite a rosary, taking time to sit with my Goddess and recite her praise. I meditate on the mysteries of her life and let her wisdom fill me.

Ostara—celebrated March 21st (spring equinox), it commemorates the goddess Oestre and the return of life on Earth. Spring is upon us and winter has been defeated. From the name of this goddess, we get our own Easter, the greatest Christian Holy Day of the year. Although the focus of Easter is certainly on Christ's passion and resurrection, we celebrate the same theme on Ostara: the victory of life over death. Easter is the high point of the Christian calendar, as it celebrates the greatest mystery of our tradition: that of Christ's resurrection. I tend to focus on the Christian aspect of this celebration, although I keep my Witch's vision open. The celebration begins forty days earlier with Ash Wednesday, as we remember that we are mortal and that our bodies will return to the earth at the end of our journey. Lent is a time of personal preparation for the celebration that awaits. People tend to give up something they like as an act of penance. Being a Witch, I know that the most important tool I have is myself, and I use this time to correct something about myself. This requires honesty and dedication. But I have found that making a commitment for forty days usually results in permanent change of a behavior or forms a new habit that I want in my life. It is truly a transformative experience. This leads us to Holy Week. Holy

Week is my yearly retreat, my time of renewal. On Palm Sunday, we relive the Passion of Christ. I bless my palm branches and place them on my altar for the year. On Holy Thursday we commemorate the Last Supper. I bake bread that we share amongst family and friends. There is the symbolic washing of the feet that reminds us that we are meant to serve our brothers and sisters.

Good Friday has always held a special meaning for me. It is a day when I try to remove myself from the turmoil of everyday life and take a walk with my Lord in his final days of humanity. Every year I receive a new revelation, a new lesson. I usually take a walk to the river and sit on a rock. I breathe in the spring air and let the world fade away. Usually, clear as crystal, I hear a voice in my head telling stories, or a single phrase that puts my life into context.

After this quiet day, it is time to celebrate the Easter Vigil. It is the most beautiful celebration of the year for me, for it is the one during which I feel the most at home. Of course, it is a Christian celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. But the Witch in me also finds herself in the midst of her elements. There is the blessing of the fire that is passed throughout the crowd. Then the baptismal water is blessed for the year and the priest asperges us with it. The procession continues with the burning of frankincense and myrrh. And all around are lilies and gardenias, symbol of the renewal of life on Earth. Fire, water, air, and earth. The liturgy reviews our tradition all the way from the beginnings of the world to the resurrection. It is the hour of glory for my Lady, Mary Magdalene, first witness of the resurrection. All around, music resounds, bells ring, and life surges forth.

Beltane—celebrated May 1st, it is a fertility festival, when young men and women showed their intention for union in various ways . . . With the return of spring and its potential for growth, it also symbolized the sowing of seeds

in hopes of a good harvest. There used to be a Christian celebration associated with May 1st, named May Day. It was centered on the Virgin Mary, with processions of young virgins that were of age to get married. The fornication aspect of the feast was dampened somewhat. However, it is not difficult to imagine young, virile men flocking to this celebration, with hopes of finding a most attractive young lady. Again, we see a similar theme, that of fecundity and promise. After the solemnity of Easter, I like to celebrate Beltane in a more lighthearted way. I usually get together with my Pagan friends, and we have a ritual invoking fertility in our lives. Fertility can come in many ways: creativity, accomplishments, children, finding love . . . We usually laugh a lot and dress up more frivolously than usual. Then, I just might take my husband out on a date and see what happens . . .

Litha—celebrated June 21st (the summer solstice), the longest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. Litha is the first of four harvest festivals. The Goddess is pregnant with possibilities. Thanks is given for the harvest of small fruits, and the blessing of livestock takes place. Traditionally, people jump over bonfires for blessing. Christians celebrate St. John the Baptist on June 24th. This a very important feast in many parts of the world. Maybe it is the underground importance of St. John as Jesus' precursor and kin that warrants such a sustained celebration. Or, maybe, nature is so benevolent and giving at this time of the year that we could not let this time pass by without celebrating it.

For me, it is a day for soaking up the sun's energy. Nature is at its peak. The earth is vibrant with energy. Where a few months ago life was just beginning, now it is in full bloom. All we have to do is sit and let it quench our souls. And since the day is so long, we often get together with family and friends to celebrate with bonfires and cookouts until the sun goes down.

Lammas—celebrated August 1st, it celebrates the corn harvest. Lammas is also called *Lughnasadh*, in honor of the sun god Lugh. The feast of the Assumption is celebrated on August 15th and is a national holiday in certain countries. When it comes to the harvest festivals, I like to focus on the cycle of nature and the energy of the earth. The corn harvest is a symbol of the sustenance of the earth. It is a symbol of how reliant on the earth we are and how God continues to sustain us through the earth. I walk the earth, feeling its special energy beneath my feet. I take a moment to take note of what it is that I am harvesting. Is it healthy, growing children, or new projects at work, or new friends, or new skills? I also plan next year's harvest by writing down on a corn husk the things that I would like to achieve by next year's harvest. I offer it to my Lord and Lady, asking for their support and protection. I keep it in my workspace as a reminder of what is truly in my heart.

Mabon—celebrated September 21st (autumn equinox), it celebrates the bulk of the harvest. Mabon is a time for thanksgiving for the bounty of the earth. In early October, in Canada, we celebrate Thanksgiving, a feast celebrating all that has been given to us throughout the year. Since it is a statutory holiday, Thanksgiving is a time for sharing with family all the bounty that we receive from God. We prepare a feast with freshly harvested vegetables and rejoice in the time we spend together. We laugh, tell stories, and enjoy the crisp autumn air and the vibrant colors on the trees.

On the equinox itself, I take a moment to acknowledge the passing into a time of increasing darkness. Winter is coming, and this requires preparation. Winter is a time for slowing down, for reflection, and for quiet indoor activities. I thank the earth for its bounty and for all the activity that I was able to complete during the summer. I take note of what I still need to finish up, so that by the time winter comes I will be able to settle into its quiet rhythm. I take out the books that I want to read and the craft projects

that I want to complete. It is the turning of the seasons. To be a Witch, you must be able to read the signs of the earth. It is God's infinite wisdom to have given us a time for rest and a time for work. Mabon is the turning point, a time for giving thanks for the fruits of our labor and for looking toward the rewards of rest.

Samhain—celebrated October 31st (Halloween). Samhain is the last of the harvest festivals and the Witches' new year. It is also the day when the veil between the world of the living and the dead is the thinnest, allowing our ancestors to roam the world freely. Christians acknowledge All Saints' Day (November 1st) and All Souls' Day (November 2nd), when we commemorate the passing of members of our families and remember our ancestors. My family and I have created a tradition around this day. We set a place for our departed loved ones at the table so that they may sit with us as they used to. We light a candle for our ancestors and the loved ones who have gone before us. We tell them that we have not forgotten them, that we miss them, and that they are welcome in our house. They are truly amongst us for that night. The first time we took the time to acknowledge them as a family was after our son was born. We presented him to our ancestors, asking for their blessings and for their help so that he would grow strong. We presented him especially to his grandmother, my husband's mother, who had already left the world. As we concluded our little celebration, my son's toy phone started ringing. We looked at each other in amazement. It had never done that before and hasn't since. The lines of communication were indeed open, and our loved ones had found a way of telling us that they were truly in our midst.

It is also traditional to perform divination to see what is to come in the upcoming year. We each pick a Tarot card from the deck to guide us in the months ahead. I also host a Tarot open house. All our friends know that they

can drop by for a Tarot reading on Halloween night. In the midst of all of this, of course, are jack-o'-lanterns, candy, costumes, and the ringing doorbell of trick-or-treaters. It makes for a fun-filled evening.

In summary, both Christians and Pagans celebrate light, love, life, fertility, the bounty of the land, and the passing of our loved ones. Our rituals and invocations may differ, however slightly, but our celebrations are the same. As creators of our spiritual practices, we have the infinite possibility of celebrating these things with our own personal rituals and language. We can choose to focus on the Christian aspects of the feast only, or we can mix and blend all flavors to celebrate life in its entirety. It is entirely up to us.

Esbats

The appeal of being a Witch is that it is a way to reconnect to nature in all its sanctity. None of nature's cycles is more rhythmic for a woman than the cycle of the moon. It is so aligned with us that our very bodies respond to it. It is the ebb and flow of life, the up and down of our femininity. As such, it is sacred.

As the Charge of the Goddess compels, once a month, when the moon is full, I take the time to acknowledge this energy. I look up to the sky when the nightly orb is at its peak, and I whisper a word to let its abundance of rejuvenation and strength into my life. It is Sofia, the wisdom of the world. This is when the Goddess speaks to those who take a moment to listen. A small meditation and a word of praise are my standard rituals. But when I am truly in need of something, I will go to the extent of creating a full ritual with an altar, elemental representations, quarter calls, and symbolic representation of my request. This focuses me to receive that which I have asked for and to make sure that it is indeed what I need.

The effort I put into the ritual also demonstrates to the universe the extent of my need. It is a gesture of goodwill, in a way. It says, "See to what extent this is important to me." I am always mindful of what point of her cycle the moon is in. When she is waxing I focus on abundance, on making the things in my life grow. When she is waning, I clean up what needs to be renewed. As the sun rules the seasons, the moon sets the rhythm of my days. She keeps me dancing on a veil of celestial music so that I am always reminded of the ebb and flow of nature within me.

Rites of passage

"Hey! I need to ask you something." This was my colleague Marla, a bubbly young woman who had become a good friend. "My boyfriend and I had a discussion last night, and I figured you would know the answer."

Marla and her boyfriend had been talking about having children one day. She had been baptized into the Catholic faith, but her boyfriend had not. It was evident following their discussion that he was opposed to imposing a sacrament on someone without their actual consent. Marla was not particularly attached to religion either. She looked at me, not knowing how to continue. "We can't exactly do . . .

nothing, you know. It feels weird not to have a ceremony of some sort. We have to celebrate something, don't we?"

I looked at her with surprise. We had never talked about religion before, and I wondered why she had come to me with this question.

"There are many ways to celebrate life," I told her. "You bless your child every day with your love. That is the only justification you need to lead others in celebration. What people look for in a rite of passage like baptism is the participation of the community and a chance to rejoice for such a blessing. The importance is the ritual, whatever it may be. You may call it a baptism, a naming, a welcoming, a homecoming, a presentation . . . You can

have the participants say their wishes to your child, or plant a tree in commemoration, or simply share a meal together and share laughs. You can lead it yourself or ask another person to do so. Celebration and ritual are personal. They come from within. They are a public demonstration of what you feel inside: the joy, the thanksgiving, the need to share with others. It's all up to you."

She looked up at me, relieved at the justification I had given her, and said, "Well, I hope on that day you will be available to lead the celebration."

Rites of passage used to be a tribal event. They were a time to commemorate achievements, to celebrate new stages in life. With the disintegration of the tribe, religion has been our only source of celebration. Save for birthdays and graduations, very little is still celebrated socially. This is unfortunate, because rites of passage are an important component of our psycho-spiritual growth. A rite of passage is a public acknowledgment of an accomplishment. This is so important. Imagine doing something that gets you recognition from your whole family, friends, and neighbors! Not just a pat on the back and a "good job." A full-blown celebration.

It used to be that young boys would have to perform a great feat, such as a vision quest or killing their first game, before being admitted into the ranks of the men. And then what a celebration: to become a man! Couldn't our young boys and girls receive equal honors for landing their first jobs at a video store? Or when they move out on their own for the first time? Growing up has become an unchartered territory. We wonder why so many young people seem lost, unsure of themselves and insecure in front of responsibility. They try in vain to figure out if they are adults, while the world continues to consider them as children. A celebration of first menses for a girl recognizes her new role as a woman. She may still be a child, but

her body is ready to conceive. What better time than that to have a private celebration with other women to celebrate the Great Mother and to acknowledge the responsibility she holds as the giver of life?

Boys, too, need the recognition and the self-confidence to take responsibility. When hormones are raging and puberty is taking over, why not celebrate a coming of age? A trip with other men, in nature, can awaken a sense of responsibility for the survival of others. The legacy of such a trip can last through generations. The memory of the father figure will be linked forever to that moment of celebration, a moment not only learned but lived.

Being part of organized religion does not preclude our celebration of rites of passage. Different denominations of Christianity have different sacraments that link us all in a great family of faith. That link remains important to me, because solitary practice is, in fact, quite solitary. There is great joy in sharing a moment with others of like faith. That is why I have continued to participate in the rites of my church. But I keep my eyes and heart open for other reasons to celebrate and offer thanks to the Almighty. There are so many!

Join me in ritual

Light a coal, drop a few grains of myrrh and frankincense on it, and let the smoke fill your personal sanctuary. This is the house of God, a place of worship, a place to meet face to face with the Divine. We are all gathered to bring forth the holy fire of life and love, and to draw it deep within our souls so that it may sustain and nourish us.

The altar has been set for a sacred occasion. At each quarter is a representative of the elements: salt in the north, frankincense and myrrh rising in the east, a candle in the south, and a chalice of water in the west. Two white candles stand in honor of our Lord and Lady. A red candle stands in the center, symbol of the Holy Spirit, the holy fire within. It shines with

cinnamon oil, its aroma mixing with the rising frankincense. In front of this candle is a pitcher of warm water and a cup. Leaves of nettle, thyme, and lavender lie in the cup, awaiting their awakening.

In preparation, let us wash our hands so that our intentions may be pure and true.

"Lord Jesus, keep me faithful to your commandments and teachings so that I may never be separated from you."

Merging our energies together, let us walk around our altar, casting a circle of light to protect our sacred rite.

"Light of the moon, in its full tonight, protect our space."

Walk with me to the north quarter and raise your hands:

"Archangel Raphael, guardian of the realms of earth, of strength and healing, bless us with your presence on this most sacred occasion. Hail and welcome!"

Then to the east:

"Archangel Gabriel, guardian of the realms of air, of inspiration and wisdom, bless us with your presence on this most sacred occasion. Hail and welcome!"

In the south:

"Archangel Michael, guardian of the realms of fire, of courage and passion, bless us with your presence on this most sacred occasion. Hail and welcome!"

Then in the western corner:

"Archangel Uriel, guardian of the realms of water, of love and compassion, bless us with your presence on this most sacred occasion. Hail and welcome!"

Our space is dedicated. We walk back to the altar.
Light our Lord's candle, saying:

"Lord, you promised that you would be with us until the end of time. We ask you to sit in our midst so that our spirits may be filled with your life-giving light."

We then light our Lady's candle:

"Holy Mother, you are the gateway to life. Fill us with the love only a mother knows and soothe our thirsty souls."

We now light the spirit candle. We focus all our energy into the center of our being, and we let it reach down into the life-sustaining earth. As a tree reaches for nourishment with its roots, so too do we draw up energy from the earth. We let it bubble and whirl in the center of our being. The flame flickers as the energy mounts, symbol of our request for holy fire within. When you can hold no more, blow this energy gently into the bowl of water. The water is now full of the earth's energy, of your breath, and of the holy fire of our dedicated candle. Truly holy water.

"*Water of healing and purification, be blessed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and of the circle of Holy Women. Amen.*"

Pour the water onto the herbs. In this cup, behold the purity of water, the healing of the earth, the breath of life, and the holy fire that make everything come to pass. Let us sit quietly with our Lord and Lady, their angels, and the blessed power of the elements. Listen with your heart for words of wisdom the Holy Ones have for you. We are in their midst. They wish to teach us. Let

us receive their wisdom and teachings. That is why we have come. That is why we are here.

"Thy will be done."

Bring the cup to your lips and let all the goodness of Spirit fill you with life.

"Thy will is done.
Now we go into the world.
May your holy fire shine within us and sustain us always.
Amen."

To Seek

There came a time when I had to leave Crescent Moon School. I had learned much, and I am forever grateful to my teachers for giving me a safe place to search for myself and to discover the magic of the world. But it was time to leave that safe nest and to wander the world in search of new teachers and new experiences. There was no Book of Shadows for me to receive and no ordination to consecrate me to clergyhood. I had to make my own way. Such was the path that I had chosen.

Random steps took me to a variety of places. I attended Pagan festivals and met interesting people. I visited the Spiritual Science Fellowship. There, I attended lectures on unity in diversity, metaphysics, and quantum physics. I saw the most beautiful depiction of our world. At the same table sat an Eastern Orthodox scholar, a priest, a rabbi, a sheik, and two yogis. They all talked about what unified us, the common points in our faith, instead of focusing on the divides in practice. From there, I started reading about metaphysical occurrences in Eastern Orthodox monasteries and how devoted hermits can reach states of levitation, healing, and bilocation.

More random steps took me to a shamanic retreat, where I learned the basics of journeying through the different spirit worlds. This was a way to continue my training without having to deal with the complications of religion. I discovered dance meditation and went on to learn Reiki, chakra balancing, and somatics. I took courses in bioethics and theology. I read about Kabbalah and Gnosticism and mythology and quantum physics, and although I was not enrolled in any form of structured magical training, I soon found myself studying a curriculum of my own making. My studies were my path. I sat in meditation to receive wisdom from above and drew from what I read, building my repertoire of tools and symbols so that I could reach out and communicate better with the world above and the one around me.

One of my religion teachers in high school, an elderly Jesuit, once told us that studying was the greatest act of loving kindness one could practice. You never know when something you've read or a skill you've learned may help someone else in their time of trouble. Studying is also a way of reconnecting with those who have passed before us and who have taken the time to put their thoughts and experiences to paper. It is an act of devotion to our ancestors and an act of love for future generations who will benefit from the fruits of our labor. With this in mind, everything you do is an act of love, whether it is theology, music, or plumbing. Jesus came with nothing and walked the world with nothing. All his power was within himself. My wandering years taught me that we must invest in ourselves and carry our gifts wherever we go. Our knowledge can be used to teach others, or entertain, heal, or support others. I became the instrument of my practice.

Creating sacred space

Witchcraft is not easy. To be a Witch is infinitely more than casting spells and reading Tarot cards. It is a path based on revelation and constant

communication with another realm. Such a path cannot be lived in the midst of turmoil. I would go as far as saying that it is outright dangerous for a person to attempt this path if she is not at peace with herself. It needs to be walked in a space of clarity. How easy it would be, otherwise, to shape and distort the messages of the unseen to suit our own agendas, even with the best of wills.

One must live in complete honesty with oneself and the world. One must be able to receive wisdom and question its source: did that come from a place of higher wisdom, or is that my own voice trying to serve my own purpose? Imagine if such a person attempted to act as a guide to others, using a gift of revelation to manipulate or trigger reverence. What damage could ensue! Too many people of the Craft flaunt their gifts to awe vulnerable people. This drives the Craft underground. Such behavior is not acceptable from any Witch.

For Christians, humility and compassion are fundamental teachings. I asked our Lord once to help me understand what it meant to be humble. That night I had a dream. A group of us were playing volleyball on a beach. A friend passed by angrily. She was heavily pregnant and was angry not to be included in our game. As she stomped away, she slipped in the sand and fell. I ran to her to see if she was all right. She clutched her belly in fear, looking up at me for reassurance. A light came out of nowhere and shone on both of us. I told her, "You have to let go of your own desires and put the baby first, no matter what. Nothing else matters but your child."

When I woke up, I sat puzzled. Did that relate to humility at all? But I realized that this dream epitomized the essence of humility completely. Humility is forsaking ourselves for the sake of something bigger. One who does not display this kind of humility cannot be a Witch, for whose goal is not the greater good will not receive true wisdom.

The search we embark on cannot be done in the midst of turmoil. This is why finding sacred space within ourselves and in the world is so important. A Witch does not need a temple of wood and stone. She is her own sanctuary. This sanctuary is a special place, and although we are born with its structure, it is a place we need to build one step at a time.

Make room for silence: In our modern world, there is little opportunity for silence. We almost fear it. We live in the bustle of busy workplaces, noisy supermarkets, deafening entertainment venues . . . It seems that the minute we do get a moment of silence, we feel uncomfortable and restless. We automatically turn on the radio in the car or turn on the television while we cook dinner. When we learn to sit in silence without feeling uncomfortable, that is when we can start cultivating peace. By changing the outside world, we also change our inner world. By making space for silence in our routine, we make place for inner silence to come forth. If we are to receive wisdom in our Self, our minds and hearts have to be uncluttered from our daily cares just for a few moments. Cultivating silence allows us to switch "on" our sacred space by focusing inward and reconnecting with our Spirit.

Grounding and centering: Grounding is a common meditative technique and is the starting point of all magical work. No magic is safely done without grounding. It is a way to connect energetically to the earth in order to gain its stability. It also allows excess energy to be sent back to the earth, where it can be recycled. If this excess energy is left to accumulate inside the body instead, we can become heady and even faint. Being grounded allows us to channel and work with great amounts of energy without losing control. In this state, we work "in Presence"; that is, we work with as much energy as we need while remaining fully aware of our Self and of our surroundings.

Grounding meditation: Sit down in a quiet place. Make sure you will not be distracted and that you are comfortable. Loosen your clothing, let down your hair . . .

Close your eyes. Take a moment to be present. Close the door on the events of the day, leave them behind for a moment. Breathe in through your nose, hold your breath in your belly for a couple of seconds, and then exhale gently through your mouth. Release all the tension in your mind and in your body with your exiting breath. As you inhale, imagine that you are inhaling a soothing light that fills your body. This light brings warmth and a deep relaxation. Continue inhaling light and exhaling tension, until you feel vibrant and peaceful.

Focus on your body. Notice where your energy is concentrated. Is there a part of your body that holds more energy than other parts? Is there a place where you feel most stable, a place where you feel at home? This is your center, the center of your energy body. Take a few moments to concentrate on that point, to feel the well-being in your sacred body space.

With your mind and energy focused on your center, imagine a string of light emerging from your center and going downward into the earth, like a root. Feel your roots going from your center and from your legs, thighs, and back like a giant tree, going through the floor, through the foundations of the house, and digging through the rich earth beneath you. As you inhale, imagine the richness of the earth nourishing you. Feel the energy of the earth, the nutrients going up your roots in a trickle of colored light and filling you with stability and strength. As you exhale, let your tension and negativity go down your roots into the earth, where they can be recycled. Continue breathing in and out, feeling connected to the center of the earth, knowing that anytime you need this stability and nutrition, it is right there beneath your feet. When you are filled and

balanced, slowly bring your roots back into your body and into your center. Take a few moments to get back to your reality. Listen to the sounds of your surroundings. Feel the floor under you. Then slowly open your eyes.

Creating sacred space in your home

The place where we live is a reflection of our own inner space. Allowing space for our tradition in our home gives us a place of focus, a reminder of the path we have chosen.

• The first step in creating this space is ritual cleansing. The first tools of the job are a good ol' mop and a rag. For additional magic, I add some herbs to the water for washing the floor. You can choose any herb according to the energy you want to fill your house with. I sometimes add birch for protection, lavender for serenity, and roses for love.

• Clean the psychic energy of the house. This is traditionally done with incense. Sage works great to fumigate out bad vibes and has been used by Natives for centuries. You can also use the other elements to help you out: the purifying aspect of fire by lighting a candle, a bell or gong for air, a mixture of water and herbs to spray through the air, and of course your own energy, drawn up from the earth and directed toward the space you wish to dedicate.

• Create a focal point: Once your home is clean, select a place where you'd like to create your space. It can be in any room or even in the garden, next to a place where you can sit in meditative peace. It can be as simple as a picture on a mantle or a special stone or object you hold dear. You can also build a full altar, complete with elemental representations and tools of the Craft. When I look at my altar, I see bits of myself. There is an icon of the Black Madonna, symbol of the Great Mother and her connection to an older fertility tradition. There is an icon of Jesus, pillar of my faith. I have my

drum and rattle to walk the spirit worlds. There are stones, incense, a candle, and a chalice as representations of the elements. These objects are my signature, symbolic representations of my journey. I can walk up to this altar and present my request to the Great Source in the words of a Christian Witch, in all honor of my heritage and with all the power of the lineage of those who came before me.

Churches and sanctuaries

Whenever I find myself in times of trouble, I rush to a sanctuary. I have spent many hours at St. Joseph's Oratory on Mount Royal in Montreal. I would walk into the great sanctuary and sit in peace, away from the world and its torment. I would feel the blazing heat of a thousand votive candles and inhale the warm scent of polished wood. I would be surrounded by the symbols of my tradition and feel comfortable there.

Outside of service hours, there were few people scattered throughout the large space. Closing my eyes, I could hear the soundless echo that filled the vaulted ceiling. The crypt was filled with the memory of a million whispered prayers. Padded feet walked the aisles and stopped at the foot of the cross. Occasionally, you could hear a sigh, a sob, the murmur of a rosary. This is where I could truly pray. All of a sudden, breathing wasn't so hard anymore. There were others like me, living what it was to be human, with all its joys and pain. We were all the same in front of this great power. It did not judge us or lecture us. It was just there, in its abundance, embracing us in the velvety silence of a church. These fervent, whispered prayers, tears, and joys are what have sanctified these buildings. And I know that I can always come in for a moment of peace, no matter the time of day. These churches are always there.

As I delved more into Witchcraft, even the faces of my Christian sanctuaries started to change. One day I entered the Notre-Dame Basilica of

Montreal, a smaller-scale replica of the Notre-Dame de Paris. I had passed by many times but had never entered. I looked up to see a thousand silver stars on a dark blue ceiling. I felt as if I could lift up my hands and celebrate as I had done a hundred times in the light of the full moon. The dedication of this sanctuary to Our Lady struck me as oddly synchronous with the female symbology inherent in the moon and stars. My vision had been turned on and my curiosity piqued. I walked down the main aisle and marveled at the beauty of the construction, the ornate pulpit, and the side chapels. There were numerous alcoves around the perimeter where votive candles burned in front of statues of the saints that had marked the foundation of New France. I looked up at the altar and the cross above it.

But it was not the cross I got hooked on. There, at the foot of the cross, were the women. They were there, where they should be and where they had always been. In this sacred site dedicated to Our Lady, she had not been swept away. Both my Ladies were there, Mary and Mary Magdalene, looking up at their beloved. They were as large as life. Then my gaze narrowed in on a benign object at the foot of the cross. What was that? I got closer to get a better look. At the left side of the cross, as if it had been forgotten there by a passerby, was an urn. The chalice, the womb, the Holy Grail. It could not be otherwise. What artist would casually add something so ordinary to the rendition of such a crucial moment if it was not meant to convey some deep, hidden meaning? So there was the crucifixion with the two blessed women of the Gospels and the urn of life, the lost grail. Another holy trinity.

The light changed through the stained glass, and I noticed yet another detail of the scene. The cross stood on a block of stone. On this rock, I will build my church . . . Yet on this block was carved the crouching figure of a woman. Was it an angel? I couldn't tell. But it looked undeniably female. I looked up in complete amazement. I might as well have been standing in the sanctuary of the Goddess. I knew that if I could search every nook and

cranny of this place, I would find more of her presence. Here I was in the presence of the Goddess in her new form. I could feel her vibration—that cool, crisp ring like silver bells or the light of the moon. I had never felt this energy in other churches. She was the Goddess.

It made sense that she would still be among us in our sanctuaries and that she would manifest herself through her symbols of old. All I needed was the vision to read these symbols to rediscover that she was still here in the midst of my own tradition. I knelt down one more time, the smile on my face a testimony that I knew something others didn't. I had seen the cauldron, found the Holy Grail. I did not need to go elsewhere. Here in this holy site, I could sit in the presence of both God and Goddess without betraying either.

Outdoor space

It is clear that no construction or holy site can rival the holiness found in nature. This holiness is of a completely different fabric from that found in an enclosed space. It is only by being in nature that we truly understand the greatness of the Creator and the greatness of our human condition.

I was walking down the street one night in a small community called Waskaganish, on James Bay in northern Quebec. It was very cold. The snow crunching under my feet was crisp from the frigid, dry air of late December. The stars were like blue jewels on a dark, velvety sky. I couldn't remember having ever been more alone. I was so far away from everything that I knew. I was in the land of the Cree, far away from home. I knew no one in this community. I was far from my friends, my husband. There was not a soul on the street, no familiar hum of cars and machinery. But I did not feel lonely.

Here I was in a small community of a thousand-odd people in the middle of complete emptiness, hours away from any other settlement—a little hub of civilization in the winter whiteness. I looked up at the sky. It

looked so far away and yet it was so clear. At that moment, I felt an intimate certainty fall over me. In the velvety, wintry silence, I had a glimpse of myself in a vast white light. I heard words spoken in my mind: *I have chosen to be here.* This is the world that I have chosen. I felt the knowledge of having been somewhere else before. I remembered having looked down upon the world and having made a conscious choice of becoming part of it. I made a choice of leaving my familiar world behind and choosing to experience this world fully, as a rightful inhabitant of this planet.

I suddenly felt such a connectedness with everything. I exulted in my physicality: I could feel, I could smell, I could hear the silence and feel vibration. I could see sound and hear images. The world vibrated in this cool, clear rhythm. It was so clear then what the world was about. I was walking down the street alone and I could feel everything. I realized how wonderful this world was. It is part of an experience that we are all meant to live. One wise man said that we are not humans looking for a spiritual experience; we are spirits looking for a human experience. That's what I felt at that moment. I felt that I really had to live this experience to the maximum of my ability. It wasn't just a passage. It was a choice to be here, my own free will. There is nothing debasing about this world. Being in the world is not inferior to being in the spirit. The world is a spiritual dimension. It is an honor to be here and to have the opportunity to experience what the world has to offer.

God created the world. That, in itself, is enough to venerate every pebble that lines the earth. Nature is also God's way of communicating with us. Jesus himself used nature to teach us about God. He used birds and flowers, the weather, precious stones . . . Looking at nature, we can come to understand God himself. Our world could have been any number of things. It could have looked like a barren, rocky desert. We may have walked in the sky and stared up at the earth in amazement. Trees may have been gnarly

purple things with colored pustules. We may have been the sole organic creatures to roam, feeding ourselves only from the sun.

But no . . . that is not how things have played out. God's creation is such that we have an expanse of emptiness above us with beautiful orbs of light, enticing us to look beyond our world and into the next. We have trees linking heaven and earth, made of hard, strong wood. We have this hard matter under our feet to support us. And what to say about this most peculiar substance we call water—a formless entity, impossible to grasp yet completely yielding to shape itself to whatever holds it? And the pure energy in action we call fire? And the invisible life we call air? Who could conceive of such things? In nature, there is godliness. By opening ourselves to our surroundings, we enter into communion with God.

Nature talks to us in symbols. If we keep our eyes open, we can see the signs of the times unfolding before us, no matter where we live. These symbols are often embedded within animal totems and archetypes. The more we interact with nature, the more we realize that we are not separate from it. We are an integral part of it. We are not a ruler caste put on Earth to control and dominate. Our planet lives according to its own cycles and rhythms. Wolves howl at the moon. Salmon spawn at a precise time and location. Birds migrate according to weather and light. Busy building a world of stone and concrete, we forget that we are also subject to these powerful forces.

We are influenced by the cycles of the moon, by the weather . . . Jesus himself said, "Can you not read the signs of the times?" When we look up at the sky, we know if it will rain or if it will be hot. He told us to look outside ourselves into the spectrum of time and see that there is something bigger than ourselves that constantly speaks to us. It tells me to look far and wide, farther than I'm used to. It tells me not to limit myself to the here and now, but to expand my consciousness to the signs of the ages that are still

imprinted in nature. A tree, for example, has a record in its very trunk of the cycles of drought and rain it has witnessed. Nature holds the secrets of the past and of the future. By keeping our eyes open to the world and to nature, we reconnect to a vital part of ourselves.

Animals also have a lot to teach us. I've often had moments when animals come to me unexpectedly, to give me a quick lesson or message. Turtle has taught me patience and peace of mind, telling me that I needed to slow down and let things come. It taught me to relinquish control and let go of anxiety. All was to be done in good time. Tiger was with me during my more aggressive years, when I needed to fight and prove myself. At that time, I needed to convert a devastating energy into something productive and fought to prove myself as a woman in a world dominated by men. Tiger exemplified a female, feline sense of power. Dragon accompanied me for a moment. It taught me about painful sacrifice. I experienced the pain of metamorphosis, the shedding of an old skin. I struggled to free myself, much as a newborn struggles to move toward his first breath of fresh air.

All these animals talked to me in a way that no discussion could have. I received all their wisdom on a purely instinctual level. I felt it in my being and in my soul. My reason did not interfere, could not rationalize them away. They stayed with me, teaching me a way of being and a way of growing.

By following the cycles of the seasons and the lessons of our animal kindred, we become less estranged from the world, less isolated, less alone. We become connected to the grand realm of things, to the godliness of the world. And we can touch this great power, listen to it, and learn from it through our communication with all aspects of creation. People are yearning to go back to a more natural surrounding. We so yearn for it that we can't help but answer the call of the wild. I just hope we can do this before too much damage is done to our life-sustaining planet.

All of nature is sacred. It holds a special place in a Witch's practice because it is a reflection of the Divine. Finding a special place outdoors allows a special connection with God, one that you cannot find indoors. Think back through your life. Is there a place in the world where you felt a complete sense of peace—a place where silence was not a burden, where you could stay for hours without feeling restless or eager to leave?

Maybe it is under a special tree in a park, or atop a mountain, or by running water . . . walk through your neighborhood and sense the energy around you. See if such a place reveals itself. This place will always be there, will always be pure and always divine. You can make it a place of special pilgrimage when you need to reconnect to your source.

Astral space

Sometimes we need a place that is our own, away from the world, a place we can go to in an instant. This is an astral temple. This place exists between the worlds, and it is built with your creative imagination. It can be as glorious or as simple as you want. It is your own design and it is completely private. No one else has access to it. If you wish, you can also build a meeting place with friends so that you will always have a place to meet, no matter where you are in the world. You will see that this place will get a life of its own: it will change with the seasons, and all sorts of entities will visit you and tell you great things.

Building your astral temple

Sit down comfortably and leave the workings of the day behind. Take a moment to center your energy and ground yourself. Clear your mind completely. You are about to take a journey into the unseen world.

Focus inward. The world you are going to has not yet been created. You are sitting in the Great Void. There is nothing around you or under you. Do

not fear. You are always a few breaths away from returning to the world you know. You can go forward without fear.

In the distance, you see a light. You walk toward it and see that it reveals an entranceway. Notice the shape and form of this gateway. This is a special gateway. It is the entrance to your own sacred space. When you open this door, you will find your own private sanctuary. Take a deep breath and go through the door. Take a few moments to look around from this vantage point. Is this a familiar place, or is it a place you have never seen before? Are you indoors or outdoors? Are you alone, or are others coming to greet you? Most important of all, how do you feel?

Take a few deep breaths to take it all in. Now, take your first steps into your sacred realm. Walk around and explore to your heart's content. No portion of it is off limits. It is your space; you can go where you like. You can add things and shape the landscape as you walk through it. Continue walking through to get to know your place.

Once you have seen it all, find a quiet place to sit and take a few moments to feel your space. Your sacred space is alive. Let it tell you its secrets. See yourself breathing and relaxing, and know that you can come back to this space anytime you wish. Take a moment to give thanks for the wisdom you have received. Get up slowly and find your way back to the door. Say goodbye to your temple and walk through the door, back to our world.

Take a few moments to become reacquainted with the physical world. Then slowly open your eyes. If you feel lightheaded, place your forehead on the floor to redirect excess energy back to the earth. You may also want to eat something. The trip to your astral temple will become easier and easier every time. With practice, you will be able to sit down, center, ground, and cross your gateway in a few minutes. Then you will have all the time in the

world to roam your sacred space, talk to its inhabitants, and enjoy your refuge away from the world.

The path of the seeker

To seek is to keep your vision always open to receiving the wisdom of the world. Wisdom is everywhere: in nature, in books, in unexpected encounters, in meditation . . . The Witch seizes every opportunity to develop herself. This way, we fulfill the teaching of Jesus to "be perfect as God is perfect." Because Witchcraft is a path of the world, we do not need to withdraw to a hermitage to achieve this wisdom. We simply have to make room for it in our daily life, so that every action becomes an act of learning. This can be done in so many ways: in how you cook the family meal, by truly listening to a friend's story over tea, by making time to read and learn more about topics that intrigue you, or by expressing your creativity by making things.

There are masters all around waiting to teach and share their experience. Sometimes they are quite familiar, like your child, parent, or family pet. Other times they appear in a more spectacular way, perhaps as sorcerers, shamans, and healers. By keeping our vision on, we take advantage of every opportunity to learn that presents itself. By keeping our humility and compassion alive, we can also notice when it is our turn to be the teacher and guide those who seek.

To Love

A moral code

I had just sat through a sermon from a replacement priest at our church, and I was completely disheartened. The province's bishops were sitting in conference, deciding on the new orientations of the Catholic Church in Quebec. To me, that seemed to be promising. Why not sit down and look at

new ideas, new ways of celebrating? Why not reflect on what is important to us?

Well, this priest had just shattered my hopes. He theatrically moved around the pulpit, spitting profusely with missionary zeal that the core values of the church would not be touched. Homosexuals would still be banned from church. Divorced people would still be denied the sacraments. These "core" values would not be changed. I was furious. If this was the core of my religion, I wanted no part in it.

"How is this in keeping with Jesus' teachings?" I ranted in the car on the way home. "These are all man-made rules. Jesus taught us about love and simplicity, about listening within and not following authority blindly. Gay people and divorcées . . . can they not live the highest ideals of our faith, more than this preacher, this holy man of God who spreads hate so hastily? Is that morality? Jesus told us to love. The only line of conduct we should follow is . . . "

I paused for a moment. I tried hard to regroup my thoughts, all my experiences, all I had received from my religion and my hours in prayer, in quiet conversation with Jesus. I tried to perceive with all my senses how we could express a way of life, a line of conduct, in a few words, the way Jesus would have wanted. I took a deep breath, and out of my mouth came words that seemed to flow from somewhere else: "If you do harm to no one, including yourself, then you can do whatever you wish."

A week later, I was browsing in a downtown bookstore. I'd had no formal training at that point and was only starting to learn about Wicca and Paganism. I picked up a book on Wicca and opened it up at random. I could not believe my eyes. In bold print, in the center of the page, was the most perfect synchronicity I had ever experienced:

An you harm none, do what you will

I believe in the fundamental goodness of humans. Poor circumstances create the kind of ugliness we take for granted: greed, hatred, violence . . . I am not so naïve that I do not see that there is great evil in the world. But I see it as surrounding us rather than inhabiting us.

That is surely why I find the church's whole polemic on sin so repulsive. If this stain eats at our core, then why bother striving for something greater? For an elusive "heaven" at the end of our days? The kingdom of heaven is here now. We have already begun our eternity. In the mystical tradition, the coming of the Messiah is not the coming of a priestly ruler. It is the coming of a new consciousness, an evolution above our present human condition. We make heaven here, now, on Earth. It is our gift and our mission.

There are unfortunate currents that constantly bar our way to attaining this higher consciousness. One may call this evil or sin. Sin, by definition, is a state of separation from God. Anything that separates us from our godliness and our connection with something greater than ourselves is a sin, a rupture in our relationship with the Divine. In a world where we live in suspicion and in fear of others, we feel the need to clearly define rules of conduct for harmonious living. In such a world, the simple words of the Wiccan Rede may seem too vague, requiring too much trust in our neighbors. But read them again, one more time:

An you harm none, do what you will

Isn't that beautiful? Doesn't it resonate deep inside a sense of trust in the world, a sense of underlying benevolence as well as a deep sense of responsibility? We are the law. It is not a set of rules that belong to a forbidding judicial system. We breathe life into this law by our every thought and action. We are responsible for the well-being of all that is. In this sense,

the law is not a barometer for punishment. It is a precept for life. Jesus reprimanded the authorities of his time by telling them that they were betraying the core of the law by bending to the letter of the law. He gave us back this core precept of *love*. He gave us no other instruction. None! The Almighty cared not about regimenting our lives with precise rules of conduct. Free will is such a sacrosanct value that no new laws were given to betray this concept. Only a core on which to build our lives. A cornerstone on which to build our church. Love, always and above all.

I felt truly blessed when I saw the Wiccan Rede staring back at me from the page. I tried to find a fault with this law, a loophole where "evil" might still leap in. But I knew that there was none. Our ten commandments warn us about concrete things we may do to harm others. They all fall well within the Wiccan Rede. It even extends further in the sense that it does not limit itself to loving your brothers and sisters. "Harm none" also includes yourself, your environment, all aspects of nature, the Web of Life that connects us all. It is simple and non-negotiable.

If morals alone don't keep people in check, there is a second law that flows from the Rede, which is also of great importance in the practice of magic: the Threefold Law. It simply states that whatever you put out into the world comes back to you threefold. Makes you think twice about doing silly magic tricks of a doubtful nature, doesn't it? There are people, including some Witches, who are power hungry and who love to bully people energetically. Such people forsake the Wiccan Rede and take a chance on the Threefold Law, for personal gain or to "help" someone else. What harms you, harms all. That is the mystery of the Web. We grow in love. That is our creed. Nothing less is acceptable.

I had a dream.

I was walking on the edge of a cliff, overlooking a sparkling lake. I could see my breath on the air, but I was not cold. I saw a man in a wheelchair propel himself off the side of the cliff down into the crisp waters below. Curious, I jumped after him. The water was deliciously fresh and tasted sweet. When the water dripped over my eyes, I saw the mountains transform themselves before me. They took the shape of majestic angels blowing their horns. A man swam past me. I recognized him as the man in the wheelchair. He splashed around happily at the newfound functioning of his legs.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw my angel walking on the shore. I scrambled out of the water as fast as I could, fearing that I would lose sight of her. I ran after her, but she kept on walking, paying no heed to my struggle to catch up with her. She wore a shiny golden dress. Her skin was the color of copper and her hair was dark, falling over her shoulders in thick curls. I said, "Please, wait. Tell me something. Anything. Give me a clue as to the meaning of it all, something to keep me going."

She turned briefly, let out a sigh, and said, "The answer is to love."

And she went on her way.

There was something special about the way my angel told me the greatest secret of my life. She did not take on airs of mystery or make dramatic pauses to emphasize the importance of the message. She said it matter-of-factly, simply, almost with impatience. Her attitude seemed to say, "There. You have it. Why are you so intent on finding something else? That's *all* there is."

Building a community

It was a beautifully sunny day in the mountains along the coast of southern Italy, near Salerno. I hadn't been back to Italy since the death of my grandparents six years earlier, and the air itself was singing with memories

past. My husband and I had embarked on an organized tour with a group from the village where my father was born. This trip, however, was to take us to places we did not expect.

After two failed attempts to visit someplace of touristic value, we ended up at what had been our destination all along: a mountainside sanctuary, for the annual pilgrimage in honor of Our Lady of Fatima. The sanctuary was filled with ladies dressed in the traditional black, singing hymns and reciting rosaries as loudly as possible. We entered the tent set up outside for the occasion, in order to attend Mass. I listened with horror
to a young man, barely older than I was, as he preached about the sufferings of the Virgin Mary. He hollered that she had suffered more than any other woman ever had at losing a child, and that our sins were the cause of that suffering. How could a man, a priest, know anything about a mother's suffering? What audacity!

I had just seen lines of women outside, standing at confessionals waiting to be cleansed; one of the women was a relative of mine who hadn't spoken to her aging, demented mother in years. People were pushing to buy gold medallions to pin on a statue of the Madonna that was to be brought out for the procession. It was such a circus! I was suffocating in this crowd. I truly felt ill. I looked to my husband and whispered, "I have to get out of here *now*!"

He elbowed his way out of the crowd until we were back in the open air. I felt empty. It is true that southern Italy is a bastion for traditional Catholicism. But I felt sick at the hypocrisy, the travesty of this interpretation of what are truly beautiful teachings. We walked a little farther along and sat on a stone wall. I was heartbroken. I sighed and looked up. In front of me was a rendition of the Lady of Fatima with the three children she appeared to. There she was, looking young and beautiful, with strangely short hair and without her traditional veil. In her hands, she held

up a cup and a host. She was a priestess under a beautiful willow tree. I turned to my husband and whispered, "Look, this is my church."

A couple of years later, I finally found my way to my first Pagan festival. My husband joined me with some apprehension. I was not without apprehension myself. I had been in Pagan circles long enough to put my fears of hags and vampires to rest. Nevertheless, I still wasn't sure how far down the rabbit hole it was safe for me to go without completely losing track of myself.

We gathered on the beach and prepared for the opening ritual. The priestess called down Isis and spoke her message. But my body felt encased in stone. My legs would not move; I felt dizzy. It was an altogether unpleasant feeling. Maybe I wasn't grounded enough. Maybe the excitement of being here was throwing my energy off. I felt uncomfortable. This wasn't my place. Dear God, would I ever find where that place might be?

I have always felt an intense need to be part of a group, either through sports or church or magic classes. In my darkest moments, when I felt torn between the guilt of abandoning my tradition and the desire to fulfill myself magically, I felt truly alone. The most disturbing aspects of both traditions would poke at me, in a back-and-forth dance that seemed endless.

Nevertheless, I ended up having a great time at the festival. I met wonderful people, participated in workshops, learned and shared with people of like mind . . . From a magical, energetic point of view, I was in the right place. From a spiritual, religious point of view, it was another story.

Community is a gathering of people who have something in common. It is based on relationships, on a web that interconnects and binds. It is above laws and dictates. It is a thing of the spirit. This need for community stems back to the very beginning of the Christian tradition. We were a community before we became a religion. We would gather informally to celebrate, to learn from each other, to remember the teachings that were passed on to us.

We drew strength from each other. We created a safe haven from the outside world in which we could speak freely, away from the persecution and accusations of the world. Alone, we were fragile and vulnerable. Together, we cultivated peace and strength.

It is the tragedy of the Christian Witch that she often wanders alone. She may participate in Pagan rituals and connect with the elements of earth and energy and female divinity that are so important to her. She may also continue to attend traditional Christian services to commemorate the life and teachings of Jesus and to celebrate with others who share this devotion. Sitting in a circle, sharing bread and wine and praising the Lord in her own way, is a practice that is still quite solitary. Too few of us speak out about our beliefs to reach out and form communities of our own. This is why I am sitting here writing these lines. We need not be alone. We can rush inside and escape the questioning and persecution, and sit together in peace and worship.

To light a candle in a poorly lit space,
like we used to do,
To share a meal of bread and wine,
like we were told to do,
To look within and find Spirit,
like we were meant to do.

Out in the open

I was finishing my first year at Crescent Moon School. It was open-house night, a chance for new students and the general public to come in and ask questions about the curriculum and satisfy their curiosity. All our work was displayed, and people walked around from table to table, casually asking questions of the teachers and students.

Out of nowhere my teacher burst in, in front of me, startling me somewhat. She said, "Here's someone who'd like to talk to you." I stood there quite perplexed. I was a lowly first-year. Why was I being singled out? A shy-looking woman in her thirties stood in front of me, looking down. As she spoke, I could hear a faint Spanish accent.

Without looking up at me, she whispered, her voice shaking, "I'm a Christian."

I took in a deep breath of relief and laughed. I whispered back, "Me too."

The woman looked up and smiled. She said she was Christian with such a tearful, apologetic voice that it broke my heart. I had felt that torn apart a couple years previously. But it was all gone now. I felt only relief that the torment had receded and that I could give some dignity and hope back to someone suffering the same conflicts I once suffered.

We went on to talk about our attraction to Witchcraft and magic, the elements of nature, and the sense of a sisterly bond. I told her that Christ and his teachings were an ever-growing part of my spiritual life, because I now had a daily spiritual practice that tied it all together. She thanked me for sharing my experiences and walked away. I felt that a load had been lifted from her shoulders.

At that moment, someone tapped me on my own shoulder. It was a young man approximately my age. He said, "Hi. I'm Jewish." I laughed and said, "I guess that makes us kindred then."

From that night on, I was the official Christian spokesperson at Crescent Moon School. I was no longer in hiding. I had reconciled the core of the Christian faith to the practice of Witchcraft. I felt no shame or guilt or doubt. It felt right in every cell of my being. As was eminently clear that evening, there were others who urgently needed to hear that they were not alone. In making my voice heard, I could help them and bring them hope. I

had to step out of the shadows where I had practiced in secret. It was time to live in the world.

—

We are not alone. It may feel that way very often, but there are many of us looking for our way in the dark. And we may be closer than we think. Maybe it's that ancestral fear of persecution. So many Witches—good, faithful women—were tortured and killed for their practices, so we remain fearful of speaking out. Maybe the patriarchal society in which we live makes us shy about expressing any truly personal spiritual aspirations. This holds true for men as well. The bottom line is we don't expose our beliefs to others.

In certain contexts, I am reticent to advertise myself as a Christian Witch, and honestly I see no real purpose in doing so. Some people relish the shock value of the assertion "I'm a Witch." I find this attention-seeking behavior offensive. Being a Witch is about finding something divine deep within yourself. It is not about getting a reaction from people. But I hide no longer. My books are proudly displayed in my living room, and if someone comments on my collection, I will not deny my affiliations to the Craft.

I was lucky to find a school with the open-mindedness to let me develop my own beliefs and practice, and to let me share them with others. There are many ways to reach out to others. I have faith that we will find each other, whether in groups of two or three, on the Internet, or through a common, shared focus. We are connected already through our common aspirations. We are a community, growing together in spite of time and space. May it please God that we meet physically to celebrate one day. In the meantime, we are discovering a new mission we can partake in. We are discovering our legitimacy in stepping forward into a state of priesthood, shedding the guilt and the blame and finally letting our inner light shine into the world.

One single sheep

Good Friday was upon us once more. It always rang for me of nostalgia, making the innermost of my being vibrate. I needed the silence and the contemplation and a solemn, private commemoration of the events of that day. I wrapped a scarf around my head in a sign of mourning and walked to the riverside. There would be no church service for me this year. I had just moved and did not feel that our neighborhood church offered me the privacy to mourn in peace. I sat on a rock in the chilly spring air, listening to what my Lord and Lady had to say. I heard him speak to me, one word at a time springing into my head, telling me a story:

> *There was a shepherd who grew tired of watching his sheep. He sat down in the shade of a tree and rested. He soon got hungry and ate, and then he fell asleep. When he woke up, he saw a single sheep standing in front of him, staring at him. A single reminder of what his purpose was.*
>
> *You are that sheep.*

I turned to Mary Magdalene, but she refused to speak to me. I begged and begged, and finally she turned to me and said, "Our order and priesthood have always been underground and secret. That's the way it has always been, and the way it must remain."

There are many reasons why we may want to walk a different path from the traditional one. I have gone through many reasons, some more valid than others. I've been through rebellion, rage, anger at the politics of the church. I went through phases of justification based on historical facts, romanticism, maybe eccentricity at times. But there is only one way to build a new community. The only thing a community should be founded on is

peace. With peace in our hearts, we can truly sit and look at each other in total honesty. In peace, there is no doubt. Without doubt, there is no fear, and without fear there is no need for aggression.

In peace, we can sit in our own truth, listening to others with an open heart. We can see the simplicity and greatness of our brethren, and we can build the spiritual bonds a community is made of. We can be the sheep who calmly, without blame or aggression, reminds others of their true purpose. We enter a state of being that shines unto others the peace and serenity we cultivate within our own sanctuary. Being, rather than doing or preaching or acting. Being a witness of our own inner light.

Many of us fantasize about secret societies and hidden documents, legacies of teachings that have been lost to the world. In that sense, I guess Mary Magdalene's words are quite exciting. But her tone and demeanor did not imply that sense of privilege. Rather, they suggested a sense of severity and responsibility. This mission is not to be taken up for prestige or fame. It is not to be brought to the world to change the world and cause a religious revolution. It is a private matter.

We must work from a place of humility. This priesthood, or service, is a source of underground strength with which we can climb back into the world and do what we have been told to do: fight the inequities, tend to the weak and the poor, and give hope to those in need.

I get the sense that it is not up to us to pass on this priesthood to everyone, because it is not what all people need. It is the *light* we must pass on, first and foremost, not the belief system. The belief system should never become the focus of our mission. How many people have died because they did not adhere to the religious dictates of the church? It is true of this church, and it is true of most other religions as well. That is why I think what Our Lady was saying is that we should never let a belief system overshadow its primary mission. By keeping it underground and secret, we put the focus

back on our mission of compassion and take the light away from our own egos.

Some might say that I'm contradicting myself by writing about a practice that I believe should remain secret. Everyone has the right, the responsibility even, to find their place of power in the world. Everyone's talents are necessary to reach an age of enlightenment and peace. Humans are social animals. We are not made to be alone. By finding a community, we find a place to plant our roots and grow into the fullness of our gifts. All these gifts are needed, and without them we are lost. My hope is that these few lines are the blueprint to a new community of people, who will cultivate their light in a new-old way and spread a new wave of love into the world.

Chapter 5

Spirit in Action: Ten Rituals for Daily Life

Ritual is the cornerstone of my spiritual practice. It is through these specially crafted moments that I truly become priestess and guardian of my tradition. Being a Christian Witch is difficult to define. I hope that showing what it means to me in my daily life will shed some light on the deeper meaning of my practice. Ritual reaches deep down into the soul, into that sacred place where symbols carry more meaning than words, where the logic of argumentation has no importance. It is in action that we can bring back these symbols and remember what it was like to sit in the glory of the revelation that was given to us.

When reading these rituals, some will say, "A Christian can do this ritual. You don't have to call yourself a Witch to do this!" and they will be completely right. Others will say, "This is a Pagan ritual," and that will also be true. The point I want to stress here is that Christian Witchcraft is first and foremost a state of mind. It is the acknowledgement that I alone am responsible for my spirituality. It is a way of reclaiming my faith and incorporating it into everything I do. Yes, a Christian can light a candle and whisper a prayer of thanksgiving. Few do, because Christian ritual has too often been given over to priests within the walls of a church. Very little has

been kept within the home. From the other perspective, there is nothing un-Christian about glorifying the bounty of the land and the cycles of nature. It is not traditional, but it is not inconceivable. And so both Witch and Christian can say "Those are my rituals" and be completely right. It is the acknowledgement of both faiths within these rituals that makes you a Christian Witch.

Simplicity is a hallmark of my practice. It just seems fitting considering the very humble beginnings of the Christian faith. Simple rituals are often the most difficult to explain, because they rely on feeling more than action. When I started doing magic and ritual, the actions I chose to do were extremely important to me. I took great care in choosing the right herbs or incense, which words I would say, and which postures I would adopt. I selected my tools carefully and performed each action with precision. I walked the circle, raised the cup, and lit my candles.

As time went on, I started using fewer objects and fewer actions. I focused on the energy and the feelings that arose. Through physical rituals, I had learned what it *felt* like to be in presence, to feel an energy circle, to be grounded and open to receiving wisdom. I had gained confidence and experience by doing rituals by the book, and now I was integrating all the tools within myself.

That is why I believe formal training in energy work and ritual is essential, in order to get to know what it feels like to work with energy and to walk between the worlds. It is important to have people to talk to and share experiences with so that you can see emerging patterns and find common threads. Anyone serious about magic should find others like themselves to make sure that they have someone to watch over them while they experiment with unknown practices. What's more, it is so much fun to discover this new reality that you want to share this excitement with others

who are going through the same experiences. Once this knowledge is within the very fiber of your being, all you need to enter sacred space is yourself.

Very humbly, I offer ten simple rituals that I use regularly in my day-to-day life. May they bring you joy and comfort.

Sign of the Cross

The simplest ritual in the Christian faith is the sign of the cross. It begins and ends every prayer and every celebration. It is a blessing and a greeting. It defines us. This trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the threefold God—is the center of Christian belief. But every time I did the familiar gesture, I was painfully aware that something was missing. My threefold Goddess—Maiden, Mother, and Crone—was now an important part of my life. Why should I leave her at the door when I walked into my church sanctuary?

I spent many summers in Italy as a child. From these summers, a memory lingered: that of devoted processions, celebrating saints on their feast days. I remember the movement of the faithful, like a wave, making the sign of the cross as the statue of the saint passed by. In Italy, the cross did not stop when you touched your right shoulder. You then brought your hand from your heart to your lips and sent away a kiss, to be lifted on the air all the way to the Lord. And so, I decided to continue this tradition and to let my Goddess sneak into its midst.

When I do the sign of the cross, I begin with the male trinity—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—as is my tradition. I then touch my heart and my lips, and move on to my forehead as I whisper the names of my Goddess. In my heart is Mary, the Mother, the bleeding heart, the one who loved her son with every breath, in strength and simplicity. At my lips is the Apostle of the Apostles, Mary Magdalene. It was her voice that spread the joy of the resurrection, and it was with her lips that she kissed the feet of

our Lord. From there, I lift my thoughts to Sophia, the essence of divine wisdom, the feminine spirit of God that inspires us and uplifts us.

Here is the simplest ritual of all:

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and in the name of Mary Mother, Mary Magdalene, and Sophia. Amen.

Daily Devotion

As I delved more and more into Witchcraft, magic and the Divine became an integral part of my daily life. Witchcraft is the path of seeing and sensing the unseen. It is the reading of the times, the communion with creation, and the reconnection with the divine core that burns in each of us. It is always with us. The more I lived this way, the more it engulfed my whole life and the more I wanted it to be around me always. My body became my temple, and my house my sanctuary. I could not be satisfied with checking in for my spiritual time of the week only on Sunday mornings. Every day became an act of devotion, and I wanted to commemorate that. I did not want a labor-intensive ritual. All I wanted was to take a moment to acknowledge my spirit and my guides. It was my way of checking in, of saying that I was thinking of them and of reiterating my commitment to my path.

And so, each day, when I come home from work, I mark the transition from the world outside to the world inside. I step up to my altar, light a stick of incense, and lift it three times in the air in honor of my trinities. The rings of smoke rise up to heaven and fill my house with the scent of this simple ritual. I whisper softly my daily blessing:

Blessed be thy Name in this house.
Amen.

I let the peace of the moment fill me, this peace that I feel when I am in the presence of my Lord and Lady. I see their faces and know that they are with me, blessing me and guiding me. And they know that I keep an open ear and heart if they wish to teach me.

Rituals at Mealtime

Saying grace before meals is a Christian tradition. It was not one I grew up with at home, although it was something we did during my days at The Abbey. The first time I attended a Pagan festival, I was lucky to receive attunement in Reiki, a healing method that channels the universal energy. It was an unbelievable experience. Our small group spent two days sitting in a clearing, on sacred ground, soaking in the sun and the universal life force. An eagle flew overhead as I received my first attunement. The energy flowed through me as if a great dam had been broken. I saw myself traveling the world, not so much flying above it as being pushed through it. I became everything. It was the most tangible experience of energy I'd ever had up until then.

During the class, our teacher, who was a vegetarian, mentioned something in passing that really stuck with me. He talked about the food we eat and how that food retains the energy of its experiences. This includes the people who have manipulated it, processed it, and prepared it, as well as the actual ingredients we use. It dawned on me how important our food was in sustaining us and that we were ingesting much more than just nutrients—we were also ingesting energy. Our teacher suggested, briefly in passing, that we use Reiki to bless our food as we prepare it and before eating it. This is particularly important for the meat we eat, as it retains a bit of the trauma of its death.

I still eat meat in modest amounts, because I feel my body needs it. But I take a moment, as I prepare the food, to bless it so that it becomes the most

wholesome it can be.

As I prepare my meals, I take a moment to ground and draw energy up from the earth and send it into what I am making. It is a simple blessing, and it focuses my attention on the bounty that we receive from the earth and how fortunate we are to be having this meal. Particularly with meat, I take a moment to acknowledge the sacrifice of the animal. I make a commitment to the animal who has given up its life so that we may live. I whisper:

May your sacrifice be honored through my actions.

As we sit down to eat, we simply bow our heads and give a silent thanks for the food that has been given to us. We draw up energy and send it around the table, creating a sort of circle that blesses our food and each other.

Rosary: A Resting Meditation

"Happy Birthday!" Our priest smiled and handed me a small blue box. "Just a little something to protect you on your travels."

I opened the little box and pulled out a rosary. The rose-colored wooden beads drew me in, in a way I had rarely felt before. I was mesmerized by the rosary. It seemed that all that mattered in the whole world was that little string of beads. The beads were soft and fragrant, possibly made of rosewood. The metal cross shone with a tint of turquoise. It felt natural, simple, balanced. It made my hand tingle, my heart soften. I couldn't take my eyes off it. I'd had rosaries before. I carried my grandmother's whenever I traveled. But never had a rosary made me feel this way. I looked inside the little box and saw a tiny label: *Jerusalem*. Could it be that it was the Holy Land I felt in this string of beads?

I felt it calling me in the most intimate of ways. It lured and sang. I wanted to hold it, and when I did, I felt the most amazing peace wash over me. It had nothing to do with the prayers it could carry. There was something in the very fabric of this little thing that radiated magic. I kept it close in sight on my bedroom dresser like a beacon of light, should I need one.

One night I woke up in distress. I was exhausted, stressed, and emotionally washed out. I had not slept a full night all week. I sat in my armchair, my eyes burning from the lack of sleep. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw my little rosewood rosary, lying there, simply, without pretense. I recalled the drone of the nuns mumbling their rosaries in the school chapel. They looked like they were thinking about a million other things, like what they would have for supper or what the weather was like outside, rather than truly praying. I remember thinking that it was pointless to pray this way. I had always made a point to concentrate on every word of the prayer: "Hail Mary, full of grace . . . "

Now, in the depth of the night, I had no energy and no will to give power to these words. And yet, I needed that presence. I needed my Lady with me in the darkness. The prayer to my Goddess, the Hail Mary, started feebly in my throat and rose in a soft whisper. As the familiar words tumbled out, I felt them embrace me, weaving a protective circle around me. I put no conscious effort or reverence into the words. I just moved my lips around them. There was nothing more I could do.

Soon, the string of words became alive with its own rhythm. I repeated the words over and over again. The mantra rose and fell with my every breath like a soothing wave. It rocked me and hugged me. My breath became a prayer, steady and rhythmic. Magic was spinning around me and flowing through me. My distressed mind started to settle, and the wave took me

over. The energy flowed through me without effort, gentle and soothing, and lulled me into a quiet trance, a place of peace.

I realized with amazement that I wasn't praying; I was being prayed. My body pulsed with a new life. Every ten Hail Marys, an Our Father would strengthen me. I was finally resting. How amazing, I thought, that both my Mother and Father were being honored on this string of beads. And what wonderful magic they had spun for me this night.

Ode to the Moon: Reconnecting to the Sacred Feminine

One of the reasons I walked away from traditional Christianity was to find the great Goddess. Like my God, she is a woman of many faces. She is Athena, the warrior maiden; Cerridwen, the conjurer of magic; Isis, the guardian of life; and the Morrigan, destroyer and warlord. She is the warrior women of the Torah, the Matriarchs, the blessed Virgin, and the Mystic. She is the bounty of the earth, the giver and the sustainer of life. She is all around us. How could I cast her aside? She is everywhere. Once I had gotten to know her, I realized the greatest reason why I could never forsake her: She was a part of me. She lived in me.

The moon is the orb of the Goddess. It is the orb of reflection, introspection, and intuition. It lights the phantoms in the darkness and makes us face what lurks beneath. As a Christian, I had always striven for perfection of character, striving for compassion and mildness, suppressing the outbursts, the passions, the rage that sometimes arose for no reason. As I got to know the Goddess, I started to understand where it all came from, this rage and sudden madness. This was the dark moon, the destroyer, the banisher. This was the seat of outrage at injustice, the power that protects with the fire of desperation. It was a part of me, and it was powerful and it was good. I embraced it like a gift.

What it means to be a woman, that deep complexity, has been completely obliterated from Christianity. But women of passion, of uncompromising fierceness, have been the stronghold of the Christian faith since the very beginning. So when I raise my hands and praise the Great Goddess, I awaken the memories of all these women who have been tamed under the male church. I raise every symbol of sacred femininity that has been given to us, from the Venus of Willendorf to the Virgin Mary to the goddesses of antiquity and of the Far East. They are women and they are divine, and we desperately need to bring them back to life.

When the moon calls, whether in its full or dark phase, I sit in its light. I let its crystal light fall on me like a fresh shower of star dust. With a soft breath, I inhale it and blow it gently in a circle all around me. This circle is me and the moon, a place to be Woman.

There, in the darkness, a figure forms. She is the Maiden. She is the Vestal Virgin in a long white robe, tending her temple, speaking prophecy with the voice of intuition. She is the child Mary, weaving the temple veil in complete devotion. She is Athena, Esther, the Amazon, tall and proud and fierce. She stands defiant, shoulders back, weapons in hand. She is young, vibrant, purpose-driven. She will kill for what she believes and destroy what threatens those she loves. Her face may change, her guise may change, and her weapons will vary, but she is one. She is strength, youth, innocence, and power.

The circle keeps turning and the Goddess becomes fuller. She answers the call of nature and becomes pregnant with life. This life twirls inside her, makes her grow, makes her vulnerable—beautiful and heavy with a burden she will not shed. With this growth, she becomes the giver, the sustainer. She is complete humility and complete glory, fragile and all-powerful. She gives life. There is nothing greater. The fiercest warriors tremble at such power. She is Mary in full acceptance of her mission. She is Isis full with her son

Horus. She is Cerridwen and Demeter, bringer of life on Earth. She is every mother who has ever breathed life into another so that we may pursue our journey on Earth.

The circle continues. Spring turns to summer and then to fall. The Goddess changes yet again. Her shoulders slope down slightly, her hair lightens, and the lines of the ages show on her face. In her eyes is the glimmer of knowledge, wisdom of what she has seen, lessons she has lived. Her staff is the support and guidance of the world. She is the wise one, the healer, the teacher. She commands with the assurance of one who has seen the darkness and has defeated it. She has fought as a Maiden and has lived the greatness of motherhood. She is the prophetess Anne who predicts and warns. She is the Matriarch who steers her family and upholds tradition. Her failing eyes see the spirit world in a new light. Her memories are the continuity of what has been. She is the Crone whose wisdom holds the world.

The great circle is cast and keeps turning. All around, the face of the Goddess looks on, a woman of many guises and many fates. For everything, there is a season: Maiden-Mother-Crone, one and the same and ever changing in the circle of time. They spin into one magnificent figure, one light, one song:

Holy one, Maiden-Mother-Crone
All honor unto you
You are Goddess

And as this light and song merge into you and fill you with the greatness of the ages, only one thing is certain: Thou are Goddess.

You are Goddess.

Petition Magic

The summer solstice was approaching. In Quebec, this means that two national holidays are around the corner and that summer would really be here to stay.

My good friends Jet and Valerie were sitting at the table, and we were all reveling in the warmth of good food, wine, and our friendship. We had studied occupational therapy together, and now we were all well into our second year of work in different settings. We liked taking care of people in their most difficult times. We had all found different niches, working with people of various backgrounds and conditions. Jet was working in a private clinic dealing with work-related injuries. Val devoted herself to taking care of the elderly in a long-term care facility. I had found my calling in helping people overcome their disabilities following strokes. My husband had been working as a radiology technician for a few years already. The change to full-time work status had definitely established itself. We saw the difference it had created in our lives. We were no longer the carefree students we had once been. Although we always had time for each other, the weight of responsibility was there and the demands of full-time work were taking a toll on our energies.

I turned to them and asked, "What do you want to accomplish before you die? What would make your life complete? What are your dreams—you know, those wild fantasies that make your heart fill to bursting? Imagine that you're an old man or woman. What would you say about it all? Would you say, 'There was a life worth living,' or would you say, 'Where did it all go? There were so many things that I wanted to do!?'"

We all fell silent. I fiddled with my wine glass. What did I dream of doing? I wanted a child to run into my arms, giggling. I wanted to write a book. I would love to dance in a major production. I want to walk into an art gallery and see my work. I want to write a song and hear it performed on stage or on the radio.

I looked up. Everyone had turned very serious; I could see a strange mixture of concern and hope on everyone's face. "We all have something that drives us inside. So what are we doing about it?"

Jet looked up and said, "We are doing absolutely nothing about it. And there is no reason for that."

I got up. I fetched paper and pencils, my cast-iron cauldron, and some matches. I put them on the table and said, "So let's make it happen. Are you all in?" Everyone nodded solemnly. I smiled: "Welcome to your first spell!"

Each person took a paper and a pencil, and without showing anyone else, wrote down one dream they wished to see fulfilled. I struck a match and set my petition on fire. I put it in the cauldron and watched the fire engulf it. As all our papers were burning, I said, "These wishes need no longer be written on paper, for they will come to pass in reality. An it harm none, so mote it be!"

There was a new fire in the room, an energy that was palpable, a hope for all possibilities to come true. Val and I threw the ashes to the wind under a full moon. She hugged me. This was the birth of the Dreamers' Club.

That night we were different people of different backgrounds, so I chose to perform a simple spell rather than a full-out ritual. On another occasion, had I been alone, I would probably have called the guardians at the four quarters and invoked my Lord Jesus and Lady Mary Magdalene to help me. They are usually part of my rituals because they are part of who I am, and they walk with me wherever I go. But here is an important distinction: one does not have to do magic within a religious framework all the time.

Raising energy, giving it form, and sending it toward a purpose is magic, pure and simple. And it does work based on the Will and the Word. If you wish to incorporate your deities into a ritual, it simply means that dimension is important to you and that you do not want to walk the unknown alone.

Both types of magic will work. It is just a question of making this magic the most beautiful it can be for you.

Strong Magic

Sometimes I cast a circle when I'm in dire need of something: protection, security, clarity, peace, wisdom . . . But other times I find myself walking into a circle of the world's making. My senses tingle, my vision sharpens, and I know that I am meant to do magic. I cleanse my space and ground myself and let magic unfold.

Archangel Raphael, guardian of the gates of the north, give us strength.

Archangel Gabriel, guardian of the gates of the east, give us wisdom.

Archangel Michael, guardian of the gates of the south, give us courage.

Archangel Uriel, guardian of the gates of the west, give us compassion.

I draw up the energy of the earth and send it around the circle. We are between the worlds, safe and strong.

Holy Mother and Holy Father, whose union creates all there is, I come to you with a special quest. Lord Jesus and Holy Mary, my guides, stand with me.

I conjure the image of my request in my mind. If I do not know what it is, I ask for guidance so that the energy that I raise will go for the highest good of all there is. I visualize myself placing this request on a stone slate in front of me.

Holy Ones, this is my request tonight. May it please you that it shall come to pass. An it harm none, so mote it be.

With the image of my purpose burning in my mind, I draw up energy from the earth and send it around the circle in a slow wave. This energy makes the circle brighter and brighter, rising into a vortex around me. As the energy mounts, the circle continues to spin up, tighter and brighter, into a strong and magnificent cone of power. You can hear the buzz of the energy, feel the warm air moving through your hair, and sense the heat it generates on your skin. When you feel the energy is at its maximum, raising high above your head, let it go, like an arrow released from a bow. Imagine the tip of the cone darting into the image of your query as you proclaim with a thunderous voice, "An it harm none, so mote it be!"

The energy is dispelled. Your circle is down. Thank your deities and the archangels for assisting you tonight. This rite is done.

Giving Thanks

The greatest lesson that I have learned as a Christian Witch is that life is full of abundance and that blessings ever flow for those who cultivate peace. With time, I found myself asking for less, recognizing all that was given to me. I used magic and ritual sparingly, and when I did it was mostly for creating sacred space in the world or for gaining insights into different situations. Every day I wake up, truly amazed at what has been given to me. Giving thanks for these blessings is only natural.

I start by preparing myself for this great encounter. I wash myself, letting water cleanse my body and relax my mind. I take special care with washing my hands, which will offer a special gift, and with my feet, which will walk on sacred ground. I place my hand on my heart, acknowledging what lies within, and on my third eye, seat of my vision into the other realm. I don a

special garment and anoint myself with fragrant oil. It is a special occasion. The Great Spirit has done so much for me. It is only normal that I be fit to stand in her presence.

I have always lived close to water, and the more I worked with nature, the more flowing water held a special meaning for me. I walk to the water's edge, close my eyes, and say:

Element of earth, rock of strength, hail and welcome.

Element of air, breath of inspiration and wisdom, hail and welcome.

Element of fire, flame of courage and passion, hail and welcome.

Element of water, source of love and compassion, hail and welcome.

Holy Mother, bounty of the earth, all glory to you.

Holy Father, spark of creation, hallowed be thy name.

With me at the water's edge is the gift that I have brought. I bring different things, depending on the favor granted or the blessing I have received. It can be a bit of tobacco, as is customary in Native shamanic rites. On other occasions I have brought flowers or herbs, incense, or even bread to feed the ducks in the park. But the most perfect gift is yourself and your presence.

"Lord and Lady, I give you thanks for that which you have granted me. You have never left me in want, no matter the darkness of the hour or

the greatness of my need. May this humble gift please you and sing the praises of your Names. Blessed be."

My Body Is My Temple: A Day Retreat

"Three stalks of parsley, three of sage, three stalks of mint, three pinches of lavender, and three more of chamomile . . . " I stood by the bubbling pot, stirring it, watching the leaves and flowers whirl hypnotically in front of my eyes.

Today was a day of spiritual rejuvenation, a closed retreat. This was a tradition that I had started after I began to work. I felt I needed extra time for myself and my physical health. Working on my psychic abilities and on my spiritual life meant that my body was exposed to new energetic demands. I wanted to give it something in return. So, I had taken the phones off the hook, and the TV was unplugged. Even the stereo was silent. I had woken up early and gone for a run. Now, I was preparing a spiritual bath according to a voodoo recipe. I poured in all the healing energy I could conjure. It was so soothing to participate in this little ritual. I felt connected to the Witches of old who not only conjured spells in the dark of night, but also got their hands dirty by digging up healing herbs from their gardens. I had chosen my herbs carefully for their powers of purification, protection, and relaxation. The smell arising from the cauldron testified to my wise decision.

I strained the herbs and collected the green infusion. I let it cool down somewhat, while I prepared my altar for meditation. When I was ready, I knelt in the bathtub and poured the warm liquid over me like a great, cleansing waterfall.

It felt glorious. I don't know if it was the wonderfully warm wave that washed over me or the powerful aroma of the steeped plants, but I felt at once completely invigorated and completely relaxed. All tensions melted

away. It seemed that the healing waters had penetrated into my very soul and lifted a huge, unnamed burden. I felt new.

I wrapped myself in white linen, covering myself from head to toe, and I walked to my altar. I lit a single white candle, symbol of purity. In my white shelter, I felt safe. I felt absolute "whiteness" surround me and inhabit me. I was uplifted to a state where color was not just a frequency of light. It was an entity in and of itself, a way of being. In that state of absolute purity, I heard myself say, "If I lived in your temple, Lord, I would dedicate every day of my life to its upkeep."

We do live in the Lord's temple. Jesus himself called his earthly body a temple. But it was not until I got interested in magic and the mysteries that I began to be interested in things of the body. As a Christian, I considered matters of the body to be inferior to the matters of the soul and the mind. Maybe because of this underlying philosophy, the body had always held a secondary place in my life, even though I was always involved in competitive sports and dance. I participated in sports with the attitude that the body was meant to be pushed to extremes, its limitations overcome. I'd come home from karate class with my arms black and blue, having submitted my body to a rigorous regimen.

As I started meditating, however, I began to feel my body as an ally instead of an enemy. I lived within my body and not in spite of it. During grounding meditations, my body would yield some astonishing lessons that I could apply to my life. I realized that this body of flesh and bones had a spiritual dimension and an inherent wisdom. I developed a need to communicate with it to understand its needs and wants. I interacted with it in a way that was more forgiving and more loving.

Because our vibration is so important and because energy work goes through our body, as Witches it is extremely important that we take care of our body. Energy work can be demanding. If you are in a constant state of

imbalance, working with energy can only aggravate an already precarious situation. Everything we do—from the way we walk to the way we talk, touch, see, and hear—comes from our physical being. This body is where we worship. It is both sanctuary and altar. It is the only tool we will ever need.

A regular health retreat helps fine-tune our energies and get rid of unwanted vibrations. Such a retreat can include a number of activities. I prepare a healthy menu for the day and reserve some time for physical activities such as yoga, as well as grounding and meditation. I choose a book that inspires me. If I need to reconnect to a more instinctual, emotional part of myself, I may decide to dedicate some time to art or dancing. I may go for a pilgrimage or take a walk in nature. There are any number of activities that you can do to reconnect your body with your spirit. It really is up to you.

The Magic of the Web: Magic for a Better World

I sat down for my daily meditation. I breathed in deeply, inhaling light and releasing the tension that had built up in my body during the day. From the base of my spine, I let my roots unfold and dig deep into the earth, passing the floor, the concrete, and the asphalt of the city. My roots unfolded and spread wide, like a great majestic oak.

Breathing in, I drew in all the freshness the earth had to offer. I tasted the minerals and the wetness of the energy, and I felt refreshed. When I was filled with this mineral light, I turned my focus upward to the sky. I was a tree with magnificent branches of green light like tentacles waving in the wind, reaching out for the sun and the moon. I was a being in between the worlds, connected to space and to the earth at once. I levitated into space connected now only by rays of green light, one going down to the earth and one going up into the darkness of space.

I looked up in the darkness and saw the night sky crisscrossed with similar rays of green light. My tendril of light rose up to connect to this grid. That is when I noticed the most amazing thing: around me, for as far as I could perceive, were other people like me, levitating in a lotus position, with rays of light reaching out to this web of light. As I looked up, I saw it start to glitter. Waves of light were going through it—left, right, and across. I could pour myself into it and draw from it.

And it dawned on me: we are all connected through this web. The Web of Light.

A few weeks later, our teacher asked us to write an essay on the "Mystery of the Web." I smiled inwardly at the uncanny coincidence. The Web is something you experience, not something you can understand with words. Once we get together and start resonating with others, we act like a single organism, working as a whole, each of us with our specific functions and purposes. That's where our purpose lies: to be in resonance with others. In isolation, we are just mechanics. Together, we fulfill a purpose. This is the mystery of the Web.

We are a community in progress. Our priesthood is to bring this world into a new state of resonance, a state we call love. What better way, then, than to spill this will into the Web so that we may all grow and share in this peace that is our birthright.

Sit in a quiet space. Take a moment to ground and cast a protective circle around yourself. Strong roots connect you to the very center of the earth, making you feel strong and stable. Draw up the energy of the earth and let it fill you and calm you.

Now, imagine a great thread of light going up from your center and into the sky. Let it reach the stars and the moon. Feel the electricity and pulse of the orbs flow into you. Connected above and below, you see yourself rise up into the night. You are firmly connected to the earth, and yet you stand

surrounded by the lights of the cosmos. You rise above the earth, in complete control, connected to both earth and stars.

You look around you, and you notice that some of the other stars also have rays of light flowing from them. You follow them with your eyes and you see others like yourself, smiling, beaming, connected with all there is. You smile back and a deep joy swells up within your chest. We are many, you see. We are many who hope and dream and care to bring peace and unity in the world.

You reach out and grab their hands. It matters not that you are miles away. Time and space have no bearing here. We are the Web. We crisscross the universe and envelop the earth in a glorious grid of light. Light flows and sparkles between us. We close our eyes and let the energy of the earth and the stars flow through us, up and across and down again. The universe reverberates with a soft music. This glorious energy rains down on the earth so that love and hope may stand a fighting chance against the darkness of greed and injustice. Alone we are weak. But together, connected as such in a Web of Light, none can defeat us. We are here and we care. The time we take to give back and fight can make a difference. We will not stand by while the earth is being trampled and others suffer. This is our gift to all humanity.

When you are done, say goodbye to the others and let them go gently. Drift back down to Earth, until you feel the floor supporting you. Get back to the familiar sounds and smells of the room you are in. Breathe evenly and let any excess energy go back to the earth. You have done a great thing today. Blessed be.

In Closing . . .

Our final assignment for level three was a public presentation on some aspect of cultural magic. These presentations were usually small, consisting mostly of fellow classmates and teachers. But as I walked in that night, I saw a room full of about fifteen people who had just walked up from the store below, members of Montreal's Pagan groups and Pagan resource center.

I was here to deliver an hour-long presentation on Christian Witchcraft. I was only slightly less nervous than if I had to present to a room full of bishops. I was standing in the lion's den, and my presentation was the first of the night.

I looked up and opened with a question: "Is it possible to be a Christian Witch?" There was an awkward silence. Then our class bard let out a boisterous "No!"

Everyone laughed. But I understood the seriousness of the remark. Most of these people had been hurt and disillusioned by one or another denomination of Christianity. And here it was in their face once more, in their own sacred space.

I went on to address the apparent contradictions one by one. I was subjected to pointed questions on Christian dogma, but all of them were asked in respect of our diversity. I was not there to convert anyone. I wanted to explain how I lived my practice. I wanted to give rational explanations to

legitimize my practice in everyone's eyes. Some part of me probably wanted to legitimize myself in my own eyes as well.

My presentation ended, and I could see people mulling things over. A young girl in the front row raised her hand and asked, "Why keep the Christian aspect at all if Witchcraft is the way you want to celebrate?"

She asked this with softness and true desire to understand my struggle. All of a sudden, I found myself faced with a question that could not be answered by my readings or by intellectual rationalization. No amount of research or theology articles could provide the answer.

I took a deep breath and looked up. "I am keeping the Christian aspect because I have no reason to give it up. All my life I have been blessed in the most amazing way. Every time I have been in need of anything, I have been answered. For as long as I can remember, I have been talking to Jesus and Mary. I cannot turn my back on such a friendship."

A sense of peace filled the room. The young girl looked at me and smiled. The teacher who had been grilling me all night nodded his head. All the logical arguments in the world had had little impact. But in one soft stroke the words of the heart had torn down the walls that separated us. No further justification was necessary.

We are all united by a common thread. We have different names for it and different ways of acknowledging its presence. To identify ourselves as Christian Witches is not meant to create division. The sole purpose of this identification is to allow us a place in this world to grow and shine. By living my life as a Christian Witch, I have learned valuable lessons that I can then share with others, regardless of their spiritual or religious affiliations. This is my credo, my way of life, the way I give thanks for my blessings.

- I believe in unity in diversity.

- I believe in the holiness of Christ, his mission, and his teachings.
- I believe in the sacred polarity of the universe, manifested to us in the male-female reality.
- I believe in God as a verb, a process of ever-fulfilling creation.
- I believe in the quantum quality of life, in the magic of intent and reciprocity, in the power of thought, and in the universal consciousness. I believe in the manifestation of will.
- I believe in the sacredness of the earth in its cycles and rhythms.
- I believe that I am a sacred process in God's creation and a creator in the quantum earth field.
- I believe in love, always and above all.
- I believe that we have reason to have hope and faith and that we are made to rejoice in the greatness of all things.

Blessed be, and peace be with you always.

Appendix

Comparative Chart

	Christianity	*Paganism*
Deity system	**Monotheism**	**Polytheism**
Deity figures	Threefold God—The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit	The God and the Goddess Deity figures vary according to chosen pantheon of worship. Common pantheons are Egyptian, Greco-Roman, Celtic, Norse, and Asian
Other prominent figures and special devotion	Mary, mother of God Saints Angels	Spirits, elementals, animal totems, fairy folk Reverence for the sanctity of nature
Place of worship	Church	Anywhere a circle is cast to delineate "a place between the worlds"
Regulating body and organizational structure	Highly organized into different denominations—the largest of which are Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism	Locally organized into small groups called *covens*. Covens may belong to an extended group or a tradition. Solitary practice is also common. No authoritative body or legislature.

Initiation into the practice	Sacraments performed by a priest, pastor, minister, or bishop	Traditionally, initiation is done by the High Priest or Priestess of a tradition to allow the passage of knowledge and induction into a coven Those who choose a solitary practice may perform a self-initiation or dedication
Liturgy	Determined by a regulating body and officiating clergy	Some covens and traditions have a set liturgy featured in a Book of Shadows Liturgy is generally composed by the officiating Priest or Priestess
Scripture	Bible—Old and New Testaments	No official scripture Groups will refer to a Book of Shadows which may have been passed down Mythological accounts are used for liturgical purposes
Calendar of celebrations	Holy Days relating to the life of Christ, his mother, and the saints	Eight Sabbats relating to the Earth cycles and astrological phenomena Monthly Esbat ritual during the full moon

Glossary

Altar: Table on which rituals are performed.

Animal totem: Spirit representation that carries the core characteristic of an animal.

Anoint: Act of consecrating something or someone with oil.

Archetypes: Symbolic representations inherited through the ages and still pervasive in our collective experience.

Astral plane: Also referred to as the *spirit world*, it is a plane of existence where the spirit can travel and meet other spirit entities.

Astral temple: Place of worship that is constructed in the astral plane.

Astral travel: Practice by which the spirit leaves the body to travel the astral plane.

Athame: Small ritual sword.

Aura: Field of light that surrounds each individual, usually invisible to the untrained eye.

Between the worlds: Place where magic occurs. Being *between the worlds* refers to the fact that once the circle is cast, the participants in a ritual are no longer in the physical world but are not in the divine world either. They are suspended between two realms, where they can work with the universal energies and stand in the presence of their deities.

Blue moon: Rare occurrence when there are two full moons in a calendar month.

Book of Shadows: Book of rituals and spells.

Burning times: Period of the Middle Ages when people (mostly women) were burnt at the stake by the Inquisition for being accused of Witchcraft.

Centering and grounding: Technique used to start any magical work. It consists of finding the place where one's energy is most concentrated and most stable and connecting that center to the earth's energy.

Chalice: Cup used in ritual to symbolize the womb of the Goddess.

Charge of the Goddess: Traditional text used in Wicca in which the Goddess gives instructions to her followers.

Charging of objects: Technique by which energy is suffused into an object in order to give it a desired purpose.

Christian: Follower of the teachings of Jesus Christ, traditionally a member of an organized denomination of Christianity.

Circle: Circular enclosure in which rituals and magic are performed. It is usually invisible and constructed with energy. Its aim is to delineate a space that lies between the physical world and the spirit world.

Cleansing: Removal of unwanted impurities (both physical and energetic) from a space, object, or person.

Clergy: Religious leader, who often acts as an intermediary between people and the Divine.

Cone of power: Method of raising energy in which energy is made to spin and accumulate in the shape of a cone to be released toward a precise goal.

Coven: Group of Witches, traditionally thirteen, practicing Wicca according to a set tradition, usually following one Book of Shadows.

Craft: Common term for referring to a magical practice.

Crone: Elderly wise woman. Also refers to the waning aspect of the Triple Goddess, Maiden-Mother-Crone.

Dedication: Ritual by which a person voices his or her commitment to a path or deity.

Divination: Art of reading symbols to find answers to questions. Often used to answer questions about future events.

Elemental gates: Guarding posts set up at the cardinal points during a ritual, each representing a different element: earth, air, fire, and water. Their purpose is to bring protection to the circle and to supply the specific characteristic of the element to the rite.

Elements: Essences from which the physical world was created. Witches typically work with five elements: earth, air, fire, water, and spirit.

Energy fields: Areas of concentrated energy around something or someone.

Energy work: Methods by which one learns to direct energy for a purpose.

Equinox: Date at which day and night are of equal length.

Esbat: Ritual held on the full moon.

Gnosticism: Religious movement of antiquity, with ascetic practices aimed at achieving wisdom (gnosis) to allow the spirit to transcend its material entrapment.

Goddess, the: Central deity in Wicca and Witchcraft, she is the Divine Feminine, worshipped under many guises, typically depicted in three aspects: Maiden-Mother-Crone. She is the essence of fertility, abundance, intuition, and wisdom.

Grounding: Method through which one becomes energetically connected to the earth.

Initiation: Ritual led by a High Priest or High Priestess, through which an adept is introduced into a coven or tradition.

Inner sanctum: Place within each person where the Divine resides.

Inquisition: Tribunal of the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages, whose mandate was to investigate all matters of heresy against church dogma by any means necessary. This tribunal had absolute power in investigating, sentencing, and carrying out sentences.

Invocation: Magical words used to come into contact with a deity or spirit form.

Journeying: Traveling in spirit through the spirit realm to gain wisdom.

Kabbalah: Jewish mystical tradition.

Lord and Lady: Generic designation for the God and Goddess worshipped in Wiccan rites.

Magic: Methods by which an adept shapes and bends reality according to his or her intent.

Monotheism: Religious system that worships one central deity.

Mysticism: Spiritual current that aims to achieve inner wisdom and reconnection with the Divine.

Mythology: Collection of tales, often arising from historical events, that have grown to a supernatural status and that carry symbolic representations of the human life experience.

Neo-Pagan: Term used to designate the Pagan religions that have surfaced in modern times, following the lifting of laws banning Witchcraft.

Paganism: Term relating to religions whose core practice is reverence for the sanctity of the earth and nature.

Pantheon: Group of all gods and goddesses belonging to a specific culture.

Pentacle: Object on which is inscribed a five-pointed star, a common symbol in Paganism. It represents the five elements: earth, air, fire, water, and spirit.

Polytheism: Religious system that worships multiple deity figures.

Quarter calls: Invocation to the elements at their respective cardinal point, in order to invite them to safeguard a ritual space.

Raising energy: Accumulation of energy in a confined space through a variety of techniques, in order to release it toward a precise goal.

Reiki: Method by which a practitioner channels the universal life force and directs it into someone for healing purposes.

Ritual: Series of actions by which one symbolically re-creates an event or an intent. Rituals are done in commemoration, in worship, or to manifest change. Rituals are symbolic and energetic in nature and usually include invocation and reverence of a deity figure.

Rosary: String of beads that are used to pray in the Catholic faith.

Sabbats: Celebrations marking the changing of the seasons and the related mythologies associated with the earth cycles.

Sacred Feminine: The female expression of the Divine.

Sacred space: Consecrated space where one can meet with Deity and receive wisdom.

Sensing: Technique by which one intuitively reads the energy signature of an object or person.

Shaman: Traditionally, a healer of a tribe who consulted the spirit world for healing and protection of tribe members. Modern shamans use trance to travel the spirit world in order to gain wisdom and perform healing.

Shielding: Technique by which one builds an invisible energy barrier to prevent unwanted energy from entering. This can be done around one's self, around an object, or around a place.

Solitary practitioner: Witch who chooses to perform rituals on his or her own, without being part of a formal coven.

Solstice: Either of the two times in the year (usually on June 21st and December 21st) when the sun reaches its highest or lowest point in the sky. This produces the longest day and the shortest day.

Spell: Series of actions whose aim is to materialize an intent or goal. Often, these actions are a symbolic representation of the goal that is wished.

Tarot: Set of cards used in divination.

Third eye: Energy wheel (chakra) located between the eyes, which is the seat of intuition and psychic communication.

Threefold Law: Law of magical ethics, which states that everything you do will come back to you threefold.

Tradition: Teachings that can be traced back to a common source or common founder. Covens can subscribe to a tradition if they have been initiated by a High Priest or Priestess who has a lineage that links him or her to the founder of the tradition.

Voodoo: Magical practice issued from the merging of Catholic Christianity with African magical practices.

Wand: Wooden stick used in ritual to direct energy.

Waning: When said of the moon, it is the time when the moon is decreasing —i.e., in transit from full to dark.

Warden: Person who guards a magical rite. This person usually stands outside the circle and guards against intruders, both physical and psychic.

Waxing: When said of the moon, it is the time when the moon is getting fuller—i.e., in transit from dark to full.

Web: Interconnection of all things through energy channels.

Wicca: Modern Pagan religion built on knowledge that was passed on secretly from traditional Witches who survived the persecutions by the church. When the persecutions ceased, this knowledge started to be disseminated, and adepts formed a new religion, Wicca, based on reverence for nature, reverence for the God and Goddess, and the practice of magic.

Wiccan Rede: Ethical guideline that Witches follow: "An ye harm none, do what ye will." *An* is an old word for "if."

Will: Intent used in magical work to produce change.

Witch: Person, male or female, who practices the "Craft of the Wise," or Witchcraft. Usually refers to an adept of Wicca, but in a larger definition it can refer to any person who performs magic within a Pagan framework.

Witchcraft: Word derived from the "Craft of the Wise." Practice by which one shapes and bends reality using magic and, in a religious context, follows the principles of Paganism.

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